

How Safe is Safe?

By George Porter

On a recent flight someone asked me, “Why would anyone in their right mind live in a “trailer” in Oklahoma?” This was right after the terrible tornadoes had devastated the region a few months ago. The news media had lots of pictures of destroyed housing with people picking through the debris looking for their possessions. The person asking this question was fairly intelligent and quite serious; she was also the flight attendant on this twin engine turboprop commuter airplane. (This was almost too easy)

The answer to her question was basically because people had to live in something somewhere and manufactured housing was as good a choice as any other type of home in a 300+ mph wind. She didn't buy this answer at all. She said that everyone knows that “trailers” were not safe in high winds, just look at the pictures on television; they always show them upside down and in the tops of trees. At least in “a real house” you had a chance. A real house!! Well I just couldn't let this pass. You can't dispute emotions with facts alone. You must counter an emotional opinion with logic, emotion and a few basic facts.

My first question to her was, “Did she think that little commuter airplanes, like the one we were flying in, were safe?” Of course she said yes. I then asked her if she knew that many people will not fly on commuter airlines? She admitted that this was true, but she said this was silly and had no good reason behind it. She also added that it was very clever of me to use this little trick example, but she wasn't going to fall for it. Everyone knows that air travel is by far the safest form of transportation and “trailers” were certainly not the safest form of housing.

“Now wait a minute,” I said, “we are not comparing airplanes to cars and motorcycles, let's just compare them to other airplanes.” She said that seemed fair enough, but there was still no comparison between the two, “mobile homes” simply are dangerous.

This lady was tough but I was encouraged by her “upgrade” to “mobile home” so I continued on.

I asked her if we were not flying on the most dangerous type of commercial airplane in existence today, yes or no? She immediately responded by saying that this was not a fair question, these things rarely crash and “mobile homes” are always blowing over.

I said she was right about it not being a fair question, but only because I asked it to her. She knows about airplanes and the airline industry and she knows what the chances are of being in a crash. But, I said, “How about if we ask all the people in the airport and on the street, what would they say?”

“No fair,” she said, “those people see a few crashes in the media and they form an opinion that doesn't represent the facts.”

“No kidding” say I with a big grin, “would that be the same media that is informing you about manufactured housing?” Besides that, I can name you dozens of large corporations and businesses that have a written policy stating that their employees are not permitted to fly on turboprop commuter airplanes. Can you name me one business in the United States that has a written policy saying their employees can’t live in manufactured housing?

“Well....no,” she said.

Then it was time for my closing argument.

Using that policy as a guide, we would have to conclude that we would be safer in a manufactured home than this airplane. If you knew as much about our housing as you do about airplanes you would agree. When people start comparing commuter crashes to 747 crashes obviously the smaller airplane has more of them but the chances of either are very remote. If for every 100,000,000 air miles one jet liner crashes and two commuters crash then that makes commuters twice as dangerous as the big jets.

Manufactured housing supplies 33% of all the single family homes in the United States and you don’t have to buy one if you don’t want to do so. All these folks purchase one of our homes of their own free will and with their own money, not a government subsidy. Do you really believe that 33% of all home buyers are crazy? Go look at Oklahoma and see how many of the people who lost their manufactured homes to the tornados are replacing them with another manufactured home. Do you think they feel that it was the home’s fault that it blew away or the tornados? Our homes are just as good as any other type home, but there is no way I can prove it to you on this plane today, unless you open your mind to the facts and think about it. I am flying on the most dangerous commercial airplane with you, and everyone else on board, because I feel the risk is extremely small, and it is way safer and faster than driving. It is a choice I make and so apparently do you because you fly in this thing all the time. Does that make us both crazy? Only the uninformed and the misinformed think so, and I certainly don’t intend for them to tell me what to do and how to think. Do you?

“Hmmm,” said the flight attendant, “Interesting, but I still have some doubts.”

“Of course you do,” I said, “the media has been drilling it into your head for 30 years, but just think about it for a while and see what happens to your opinion.”

“OK”, she said “we are going to land now, see you next time.”

Maybe a little chip flew off the great wall of ignorance and maybe it didn’t, but we in this industry all have to try to stop poor and uninformed opinion. The only thing to apologize about in this business is the fact that we haven’t informed the public nearly enough about our product. A modern manufactured home, installed right, is perfectly safe and don’t let anybody say it’s not in your presence without a response from you.