



Written by [James Heiser](#) on January 24, 2011

EPA Reevaluates the Value of Human Life

An agency of the federal government is having a hard time placing a dollar value on the life of American citizens. Although the debate at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has probably escaped the attention of most of this nation's citizens, it has a direct impact on the economic cost of the agency's regulations — and thus a direct or indirect financial impact on the lives of those Americans the agency claims to be protecting.

The government is always treading on dangerous ground when it endeavors to place a value on an individual human life. Such valuations often carry an air of the "Wanted: Dead or Alive" posters associated with the Old West of history and myth. And the value of a life may vary dramatically, depending on which agency is asking the question. For example, as Jack Kenny reported last November for [The New American](#), NATO forces in Afghanistan are now expending \$50 million for every Taliban combatant killed; at the same time, the U.S. Army pays a [Death Gratuity](#) of \$100,000 to the next of kin of a soldier who dies in the line of duty. The government's control of the health care industry also raises the question of the value of human life; as a Heritage Foundation project report noted at the time when the ObamaCare debate was raging:

There is no doubt that health care reform proposals being rushed through Congress are the initial steps in government rationing of health care. As has been shown from experience [in this country](#) and [others](#), under a government-rationed system the needs of the elderly, the disabled, and the unborn are pushed aside in the name of government bureaucrats seeking the "best value" from limited health care resources.

And, for [those lives ended by abortions](#) paid for under ObamaCare, the cost will be a few hundred dollars.

For the EPA, the value of a human life is rather high — and thus its regulatory value is proportionately high. [According to a recent Associated Press article](#):

For decades, the government in analyzing whether regulations make economic sense has used





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something called “value of a statistical life.”

The so-called price tag became a political hot topic in 2002, when the Bush administration tried to reduce the value of elderly people by 38 percent compared to people under 70.

Then quietly in 2004, the EPA reduced the value of life for everyone from \$7.9 million to \$7 million. The Associated Press uncovered the devaluation in 2008 and the EPA’s move was criticized by Democrats and ridiculed by comedians.

Soon after the Obama administration took over in 2009, the value of a statistical life was pushed back up to \$7.9 million.

But the haggling over the “price tag” is not the only controversial element of the EPA’s debate over the value of human life; not all deaths are equal — at least when considering their environmental value. Again, according to the AP:

The EPA proposal also would put more value on preventing cancer deaths over other causes of death, like heart attacks. That is because there is a bigger scare factor for cancer, EPA officials said. But critics say that puts a premium on touchy-feely emotions over science. ...

In the proposal, the EPA is adding a 50 percent “cancer differential” to calculating death risks. This would say the risk of dying of cancer is 50 percent worse — or more costly — than the risk of dying in other ways. EPA associate environmental economics chief Nathalie Simon pointed to scientific studies, based on surveys that say people would be willing to pay more to avoid dying of cancer, when compared to other causes of death. John Graham, the Bush administration regulation chief who proposed discounting the value of seniors, said people may say they fear cancer more, but their actions do not back that up.

Or is the motivation for the “cancer differential” the fact that EPA regulations have a greater connection to carcinogens than trans fats? The regulatory burden imposed by the EPA should not be based on something as vague as a perceived sense of more or less desirable forms of death. When bureaucrats are weighing how much the public is “willing to pay,” the mentality which is at work behind the EPA’s “cancer differential” is how much their regulations can impose in the way of costs on industry and individual citizens before public outrage reaches the boiling point. The “cancer differential” is not, therefore, a factor based on facts — it is based on fear.

What is the economic value of a human life? American families make such determinations when they balance the cost of life insurance over against other priorities in daily life. [According to information from LIMRA International](#), the “value” which most American place on their own lives is dramatically less than the EPA estimate: “The average amount of life insurance coverage on insured husbands is \$235,600. The average amount of life insurance coverage on insured wives is \$147,800.” Undoubtedly, there are many who believe that average is far too low to actually offset the economic impact of a death on an entire household. [As a Heritage Foundation report published last year noted](#):

The cost of regulation has often been called a hidden tax. Although the total does not appear anywhere in the federal budget, the multitude of rules, restrictions, and mandates imposes a heavy burden on Americans and the U.S. economy. According to a report recently released by the Small Business Administration, total regulatory costs amount to about \$1.75 trillion annually — nearly twice as much as all individual income taxes collected last year.

Decreasing the cost of taxation and regulation would not mean that Americans would spend their saving



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wisely; but they would control how their dollars were spent. As taxation and regulation steal more and more dollars from the pockets of the people, the ability of citizens to invest their income and manage their own risks proportionately decreases.



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