



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Actuary

April 1997 – Volume 31, No. 4



on the lighter side

Newspaper confirms what actuaries have long suspected

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“World Death Rate Holding Steady at 100 Percent.” So reads the headline on an article in *the Onion*, a newspaper that spoofs the news, published in Madison, Wis., and Boulder, Colo.

SOA member Stephen Brink brought it to *The Actuary's* attention in a letter to Editor Bill Cutlip. “I thought your readers might be interested in this article of vital importance to all actuaries!” began Brink’s letter.

“As actuaries, we knew of the phenomenon all along, but we were unable to measure it with any degree of statistical accuracy. Because of the lack of data, we have been forced to measure only pieces of the puzzle, such as how long it takes to reach death or how much should be spent on health care designed to make the journey more enjoyable.

“It’s about time the Society undertook some serious research in this area. As a ‘source’ quoted in the story said, ‘Everybody talks about death, but nobody seems to actually be doing anything about it.’”

Responded Cutlip, “I know this has been somewhat of an issue for some time, but I didn’t realize the extent of it. This is serious! We need to sound a wake-up call to actuaries everywhere.”

The “source” cited in Brink’s letter was Sen. Pete Domenici, a real senator (R-N.H.) who, like others named in the story, was never called for comment but were “quoted” anyway — via the imagination of Todd Hanson, a writer for *the Onion*.

Noting that death is “responsible for 100% of all recorded fatalities worldwide,” the story continued with “quotes” including:

- “I was really hoping, what with all the new radiology treatments, rescue helicopters, aerobics TV shows, and what have you, that we might at least make a dent in it [death] this year,” said the director general of the World Health Organization.
- “It is beginning to seem possible that birth — as well as the subsequent life cycle that follows it — may be a serious safety risk for all those involved,” opined the head of Citizens for Safety.
- “Why should we continue to spend billions of dollars a year on a health care industry whose sole purpose is to prevent death? That’s called a zero percent return on our investment,” noted Ralph Nader, famous consumer activist.

Hanson said he didn’t interview actuaries for the article “because I’ve never interviewed anybody for anything I’ve written for *the Onion*.” So why didn’t he make up a quote from an actuary? “Sheer, dunderheaded ignorance,” he admitted. Despite Hanson’s obvious penitence, a question occurred to him, and he couldn’t restrain himself from posing it. “Death leads us to the opinion that at least some actuaries must be overpaid. What is it exactly they’re trying to figure out? Don’t the columns add up to 100%?”

The article is available by ordering a back issue of *the Onion*. Requests should list volume 31, issue 2, and should be forwarded with \$3 and a 9x12 envelope, self-addressed and stamped with 90 cents postage, to: *the Onion*, 33 University Square, Suite 270, Madison, WI 53715. A Web page for *the Onion* carries other funny stories (<http://www.theonion.com>).



New address for IAJ

SOA members interested in applying for affiliation as “Kenkyu-Kaiin” with the Institute of Actuaries of Japan (IAJ) should contact the organization at its new address. (See *The Actuary*, March 1997, page 12.) Its new room number is 2F. The new contact information is:

Mr. Hideyuki Yoshida, FIAJ, FSA, General Secretary;
The Institute of Actuaries of Japan; Nihon Seimei
Koishikawa Bldg., 2F; 1-12-14 Koishikawa, Bunkyo-ku;
Tokyo 112, Japan. The IAJ also may be contacted by fax
(81-3-3816-4559) or e-mail (iaj96@lib.bekkoame.or.jp).