

## American Association for the Advancement of Science

*Science* serves its readers as a forum for the presentation and discussion of important issues related to the advancement of science, including the presentation of minority or conflicting points of view, rather than by publishing only material on which a consensus has been reached. Accordingly, all articles published in *Science*—including editorials, news and comment, and book reviews—are signed and reflect the individual views of the authors and not official points of view adopted by the AAAS or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

**Publisher:** Richard S. Nicholson

**Editor:** Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.

**News Editor:** Ellis Rubinstein

**Managing Editor:** Patricia A. Morgan

**Deputy Editors:** Philip H. Abelson (*Engineering and Applied Sciences*); John I. Brauman (*Physical Sciences*)

## EDITORIAL STAFF

**Senior Editor:** Eleanor Butz

**Associate Editors:** Keith W. Brocklehurst, Martha Coleman, R. Brooks Hanson, Barbara Jasny, Katrina L. Kelner, Edith Meyers, Linda J. Miller, Phillip D. Szurromi, David F. Voss

**Letters Editor:** Christine Gilbert

**Book Reviews:** Katherine Livingston, *editor*; Susan Milius

**This Week in Science:** Ruth Levy Guyer

**Contributing Editor:** Lawrence I. Grossman

**Chief Production Editor:** Ellen E. Murphy

**Editing Department:** Lois Schmitt, *head*; Mary McDaniel, Patricia L. Moe, Barbara P. Ordway

**Copy Desk:** Joi S. Granger, Jane Hurd, MaryBeth Shartle, Beverly Shields

**Production Manager:** James Landry

**Art Director:** Yolanda M. Rook

**Graphics and Production:** Holly Bishop, Catherine S. Siskos

**Covers Editor:** Grayce Finger

**Manuscript Systems Analyst:** William Carter

## NEWS STAFF

**Correspondent-at-Large:** Barbara J. Culliton

**Deputy News Editors:** Roger Lewin, Colin Norman

**News and Comment/Research News:** Gregory Byrne, Mark H. Crawford, Constance Holden, Richard A. Kerr, Eliot Marshall, Jean L. Marx, Joseph Palca, Robert Pool, Leslie Roberts, Marjorie Sun, M. Mitchell Waldrop

**European Correspondent:** David Dickson

**Contributing Writer:** John Walsh

## BUSINESS STAFF

**Circulation Director:** John G. Colson

**Fulfillment Manager:** Ann Ragland

**Business Staff Manager:** Deborah Rivera-Wienhold

**Classified Advertising Supervisor:** Karen Morgenstern

## ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES

**Director:** Earl J. Scherago

**Traffic Manager:** Donna Rivera

**Traffic Manager (Recruitment):** Gwen Canter

**Advertising Sales Manager:** Richard L. Charles

**Marketing Manager:** Herbert L. Burkland

**Employment Sales Manager:** Edward C. Keller

**Sales:** New York, NY 10036: J. Kevin Henebry, 1515 Broadway (212-730-1050); Scotch Plains, NJ 07076: C. Richard Callis, 12 Unami Lane (201-889-4873); Chicago, IL 60914: Jack Ryan, 525 W. Higgins Rd. (312-885-8675); San Jose, CA 95112: Bob Brindley, 310 S. 16th St. (408-998-4690); Dorset, VT 05251: Fred W. Dieffenbach, Kent Hill Rd. (802-867-5581); Damascus, MD 20872: Rick Sommer, 11318 Kings Valley Dr. (301-972-9270); U.K., Europe: Nick Jones, +44(0)64752918; Telex 42513; FAX (0647) 52053.

**Information for contributors** appears on page XI of the 31 March 1989 issue. Editorial correspondence, including requests for permission to reprint and reprint orders, should be sent to 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 202-326-6500. **Advertising correspondence** should be sent to Tenth Floor, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. Telephone 212-730-1050 or WU Telex 968082 SCHERAGO, or FAX 212-382-3725.

## Interview with a Risk Expert

*Science.* Dr. Noitall, you are the ultimate world authority on all types of risks, a revered figure who has just appeared in national television.

*Noitall.* A vast understatement of my true value.

*Science.* You must have a large laboratory to uncover so many facts not available to the regulatory agencies.

*Noitall.* Facts are no longer created in laboratories, they are created by the media. Any pronouncement of mine repeated in three periodicals, four newspapers, or one television program is considered a fact. My appearance on three talk shows is enough to qualify me as an expert. It is no longer necessary to have a laboratory in my profession.

*Science.* Could you give examples of how to avoid risk?

*Noitall.* Stay out of the home. More than 3 million people in the United States were injured in 1987 in home accidents; 90% of all automobile accidents occur within 10 miles of home. It is imperative that you stay away from home.

*Science.* But I've heard that many accidents occur on highways.

*Noitall.* That is true. There is one fatality for every 10 minutes of driving on the highways in the United States. I have developed a rigorous formula that shows that the more time spent on the highway, the greater the chance of an accident. Therefore, I recommend driving 80 miles per hour as a way of reducing the time spent on highways and thus reducing your chance of an accident.

*Science.* If one stays away from home, is there not an increased chance of infectious diseases?

*Noitall.* One has to give up sexual intercourse entirely. The danger of disease from that source is far greater even than from eating an apple, and it should be avoided at all costs.

*Science.* Are there other dangers about which the Environmental Protection Agency has failed to advise us?

*Noitall.* Breathing. All breathing generates oxygen radicals, which are the main sources of mutations in DNA, leading to cancer, birth defects, and very peculiarly shaped molecules in the urine. Breathing has been observed 3 minutes before death in 100% of all fatalities. We urge everyone to stop breathing until the proper research has been carried out. The EPA has been told about this relation and has failed to act on it, a scandalous display of irresponsibility.

*Science.* What about hazards from crime?

*Noitall.* A third of all homicides are committed on intimates, about a third on acquaintances, and about a third on strangers. Hence, it is imperative to avoid intimates, acquaintances, and strangers in order to reduce your risk of homicide significantly.

*Science.* Can one ever completely eliminate a given risk?

*Noitall.* One can reduce a risk to essentially zero by adopting what I call "the riskier alternative strategy." For example, one could take up hang gliding, as it has been conclusively demonstrated that fewer hang gliders die of passive cigarette smoke than those who never participate in the sport. People who bicycle without a helmet need not worry about a little nuclear reactor nearby. People who have a cocktail before dinner or wine with a meal need never worry about a little trichloroethylene in their drinking water. By the proper choice of alternative strategies, it is possible to reduce one's chance of dying of any particular disorder to any desired level. It has relieved many people of risk anxiety syndrome.

*Science.* This seems so sensible, I am surprised people don't follow your advice.

*Noitall.* Most ignoramuses are in fact following my formula without knowing it. Millions of people commute 20 miles to work, take airplanes, and choose hopelessly short-lived grandparents and still worry about clean drinking water. These people are secret admirers of peptic ulcers.

*Science.* We can't thank you enough for the time you are spending with us, but I have one last question. Do you practice what you preach?

*Noitall.* Sadly, the answer is no. My family on the paternal side has a hereditary weakness whose clinical manifestation is the "eat, drink, and be merry" psychosis. As a result, all my ancestors on that side of the family have died prematurely, in their early nineties. I doubt whether I will escape the family curse.

—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.