

Engineer's Explained – Risk and Reward

Engineers hate risk. They try to eliminate it whenever they can. This is understandable, given that when an engineer makes one little mistake, the media will treat it like it's a big deal or something.

EXAMPLES OF BAD PRESS FOR ENGINEERS

- * Hindenberg.
- * Space Shuttle Challenger.
- * SPANet(tm)
- * Hubble space telescope.
- * Apollo 3.
- * Titanic.
- * Ford Pinto.
- * Corvair.

The risk/reward calculation for engineers looks something like this:

RISK: Public humiliation and the death of thousands of innocent people.

REWARD: A certificate of appreciation in a handsome plastic frame.

Being practical people, engineers evaluate this balance of risks and rewards and decide that risk is not a good thing. The best way to avoid risk is by advising that any activity is technically impossible for reasons that are far too complicated to explain.

If that approach is not sufficient to halt a project, then the engineer will fall back to a second line of defense: "It's technically possible but it will cost too much."