



Risky Business



On a clear, crisp winter Saturday, I experienced risk management at its finest when I took my family to a grand opening of a light rail system that took years of planning and building. Excitement filled the air on this festive day of free trolley rides, and giveaways like hot dogs and T-shirts. There was no parking when we arrived at one of the rail stations, due to the large turnout. I finally left my car in a warehouse parking lot, hoping that no one cared that I had parked in an unauthorized zone (Risk No. 1).

My wife and I and three young children walked to the light rail station and waited. And waited. And waited some more. Three trolleys, stuffed with riders, rolled by before I finally jammed my family onto the next one, wondering as I did so if there would be room on a returning trolley to get us back within the hour (Risk No. 2).

I took my chances and the trolley sped smoothly ahead. I noticed that all the stations along the route were packed with long lines of people waiting to board, and that every trolley we passed was filled to overflowing. When we arrived at the end of the line, the trolley doors rolled open and riders were asked to exit (Risk No. 3).

Many of us looked out the windows at the line of more than 2,000 waiting people and said, "Heck no, we won't go." We knew a long wait was ahead once we exited. There was no way my family would be able to return to our car within an hour (Risk No. 4).

The mutinous group on our trolley cheered as our trolley started back in the other direction. I was happy to think we would soon be back to our waiting car, 15 miles away, with our crying baby. However, the next trolley stop changed the whole afternoon.

We waited for the trolley to move; it did not. After about 10 minutes, passengers were told that the front trolley had brake problems. We waited 30 minutes while they pumped the brakes, a long wait (Risk No. 5) with three children ages 5, 3, and 1.

Eventually, the trolley moved, but at a reduced speed of 2 mph. By the time we arrived at the next station, the trolley's power had shut down due to a software problem (Risk No. 6).

I mitigated my next risk and called a friend, who rescued us. Our risk-filled day ended as we arrived home.

Most of us deal with risks every day. At what point do you execute a risk mitigation plan? In their article, *Continuing Risk Management at NASA*, (see page 7), Dr. Linda H. Rosenberg, Ted Hammer, Al Gallo, and Frank Parolek, point out that risk involves the likelihood that an undesirable event will occur. They write about the importance of risk management in identifying and dealing with potential problems before they reach crisis level, focusing on the project's objective, being proactive, and involving personnel at all levels of the project.

Taking risks is a fact of life. The severity and degree of a risk needs to be properly managed or catastrophic results can occur. Manage risk; do not let it manage you. Be cognizant of the road signs along your project's route that may signal a detour or a bumpy road ahead. Mitigate those risks.

Do not get stranded along the side of the road. No risk management is risky business.

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