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Felipe Molina hoses off foam of the Big Sur Deli that was applied to protect the store at the Basin Complex Fire in Big Sur, Calif. Tuesday. Some people were allowed to go back to their homes to see how their property was. The signs thank firefighters for the efforts in battling the blazes.

## **GRATITUDE AMID FLAMES: EPA claims value of American life worth much less in today's money**

### **Cost benefit analysis puts statistical value of life at \$6.9 million**

**By: Seth Borenstein, The Associated Press**

**Posted: 7/11/08**

WASHINGTON - It's not just the American dollar that's losing value. A government agency has decided that an American life isn't worth what it used to be.

The "value of a statistical life" is \$6.9 million in today's dollars, the Environmental Protection Agency reckoned in May - a drop of nearly \$1 million from just five years ago.

The AP discovered the change after a review of cost-benefit analyses over more than a dozen years.

Though it may seem like a harmless bureaucratic recalculation, the devaluation has real consequences.

When drawing up regulations, government agencies put a value on human life and then weigh the costs versus the lifesaving benefits of a proposed rule. The less a life is worth to the government, the less the need for a regulation, such as tighter restrictions on pollution.

Consider, for example, a hypothetical regulation that costs \$18 billion to enforce but will prevent 2,500 deaths. At \$7.8 million per person (the old figure), the lifesaving benefits outweigh the costs. But at \$6.9 million per person, the rule costs more than the lives it saves, so it may not be adopted.

Some environmentalists accuse the Bush administration of changing the value to avoid tougher rules - a charge the EPA denies.

"It appears that they're cooking the books in regards to the value of life," said S. William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, which represents state and local air pollution regulators. "Those decisions are literally a matter of life and death."

Dan Esty, a senior EPA policy official in the administration of the first President Bush and now director of the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, said: "It's hard to imagine that it has other than a political

motivation."

Agency officials say they were just following what the science told them.

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