Is This a Good Risk Comparison?

1. Are you really sure of the data about both risks in the comparison?

2. Is the comparison risk lower in outrage than the risk under discussion? Is it, for example, natural, voluntary, or familiar?

3. Are you really trying to make the size of the risk clear, or are you trying to "show up" opponents? (For example, are you making any comparisons to risks smaller than the one under discussion?)

4. If you were on the receiving end of this risk comparison -- for a risk that concerned you -- would you find the comparison useful or irritating?

5. Does your comparison seem to be trying to preempt the decision about the acceptability of the risk? Are you acknowledging that risk acceptability is not a technical question?

6. Is your comparison "homey," snide, or slightly humorous -- rolls of toilet paper stretching around the world, etc.?

7. Is your comparison likely to seem self-serving? If so, have you acknowledged that you have a stake in convincing people?

8. What is the relationship between you and your audience? How sensitive is the situation, and how cautious do you have to be in choosing a comparison?

9. On balance, do you suspect in advance that your the audience may reject or resent this comparison? Is your goal to be "right," or is it to communicate effectively?