

Cause of Death: Motor Vehicle Accident

A review of death certificates by Public Health's Center for Health Statistics revealed that a significant fraction did not include sufficient information to accurately categorize the death. Among the most common cases with incomplete information were motor vehicle-related fatalities.

When completing a death certificate involving a land transport motor vehicle, remember to record the following points on the Injury page in OVERS.

Numbers 1-4 can help you complete the **Describe how injury occurred** field.

1. Was the event a traffic or non-traffic accident?

Traffic accident: is any vehicle accident occurring on the public highway (i.e., originating on, terminating on, or involving a vehicle partially on the highway).

Non-traffic accident: is any vehicle accident that occurs entirely in any place other than the public highway, for example, on a ranch.

2. What type of accident was it: a collision or non-collision (e.g., a rollover)?

3. If it was a collision, what type of vehicle was the decedent riding in or on?

For example, pedal cycle, motorcycle, three-wheeled motor vehicle, car, pickup truck, mini-van, heavy transport vehicle, bus, or other vehicle such as a tractor. *Do not use the term "motor vehicle."* According to the International Classification of Disease, 10th revision (ICD-10), the word "truck" means pickup truck unless otherwise specified. Here's the definition for pickup truck or van: a four- or six-wheeled motor vehicle designed primarily for carrying property, weighing less than the local limit classification as a heavy goods vehicle, and not requiring special driver's license. Please describe the truck, for example "tractor-trailer," "semi," "18-wheeler," or "panel truck." You may also use the term "heavy transport vehicle" to differentiate between it and a pickup truck. Also, do not use the term "bike"; instead use "motorcycle" or "bicycle."

4. What type of vehicle other or object (e.g., a light pole) was involved in the collision?

See the examples listed under #3. *Do not use the terms "vehicle" or "motor vehicle."*

Number 5 can help you complete the **If transportation injury, Specify** field in OVERS.

5. What was the passenger status of the decedent?

- Driver/Operator
- Passenger
- Pedestrian
- Other (Specify)
 - Examples: Unspecified Occupant, Person while boarding or disembarking, Person on outside of vehicle
- Unknown
- Not Applicable

By providing this information on the Injury page in OVERS, you can save yourself, and the Center for Health Statistics, the extra time to follow up and document this data. (The Center for Health Statistics *does not* have access to police reports.) Thank you for your help.

Examples of How NOT to Describe a Motor Vehicle Accident (from actual death certificates)

Motor vehicle crash

This phrase is nearly useless. It lacks information on: whether the accident occurred on a public road, whether it was a collision or non-collision accident, the types of vehicle(s) involved (the victim's and any other) and the decedent's passenger/driver status.

Motor vehicle "T-bone" collision

This provides a little more information, but still would result in the death being counted in a "catch-all motor vehicle" category. The type of vehicle the decedent was riding in should be described, as should the type of the other vehicle. The driver/passenger status should also be noted as should whether the event was a traffic accident or non traffic accident (although in this case we would make the assumption that it was a traffic accident).

Ran into side of vehicle

This is a puzzlement. It is unclear whether the decedent was a pedestrian, bicycle operator, or in a motor vehicle (and if so what type), whether it occurred in traffic, and the type of vehicle that the decedent ran into.

Motor vehicle accident, while working as a police officer

This description raises many questions. First, was the police officer an occupant of a vehicle in a crash or at the site of a crash and struck as a pedestrian? If the former, the data items described in the first example would need to be provided; if the latter, the type of vehicle that struck the officer.

Occupant in single car mva on highway

This is a better description but there are still two missing items: passenger status and collision/non-collision status.

Single car rollover with subject ejected from car and entangled in barbed wire

This is a much better description, but the driver/passenger status should be noted as should whether any of the event occurred on a public road (traffic vs. non-traffic).

Struck by truck on freeway

In this case, the decedent would be assumed to be a pedestrian and the truck a pickup truck, but a better description would have stated that the decedent was a pedestrian and the type of truck.

Examples of How to Describe a Motor Vehicle Accident

- Passenger in pickup truck that collided with tractor-trailer rig on curving road
- Pedestrian hit by auto while crossing busy road
- Operator of bicycle on shoulder of freeway struck by step-van
- Driver of minivan lost control and left roadway striking tree
- Dune buggy overturned in farm pasture – driver
- Decedent was in bed of parked pickup truck, in parking lot, that was struck by car exiting parking lot
- Driver of stolen car lost control in high-speed chase striking bridge abutment
- Passenger of bus that slid off icy roadway falling into ravine
- Passenger of car struck at intersection by light rail train