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Only You Can Prevent Accident Queries
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Recent review of death certificates by Public Health's Center for Health Statistics revealed that a significant fraction do not include sufficient information to accurately categorize the death. Among the most common cases with incomplete information were motor vehicle-related fatalities. Please remember to record the following *five points* when completing a death certificate involving a land transport motor vehicle:

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."*

5. **What was the passenger status of the decedent?**
   Beginning in 2006, the death certificate includes a section (61) to indicate the passenger status. Please choose from among the following ICD-10 categories:
   Driver/Operator,
   Passenger,
   Pedestrian,
   Unspecified Occupant,
   Person While Boarding or Alighting,
   Person on Outside of Vehicle.

By providing this information, and that sought in sections 55-60 of the death certificates, you can save yourself, and the Center for Health Statistics, the headache of additional paperwork. (The Center for Health Statistics *does not* have access to the RAIL-lines or 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 nontraffic 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 lightrail train