

## PROBABLE CAUSE

Some action (or inaction) by one or more of the drivers was cited as the probable cause in 93,572 of the 104,484 reported traffic collisions in 1999. This accounted for 89.6% of all probable collision causes, a percentage slightly higher than the previous two years, 89.3% in 1998 and 88.4 in 1997. In fact, of the fifteen leading probable causes, fourteen were driver-related. Environmental factors accounted for the next largest category of collision causes with 5,901 or 5.6% of the total. The vast majority of these (4,568) involved an "Animal in the Roadway," which was the fifth leading probable cause overall with 4.5% of all collisions. The "Other Person", "Passenger", "Road" and "Vehicle" categories together accounted for only 3.6% of all reported traffic collisions in 1999.

For fatal collisions in 1999, some type of driver error was considered the probable cause in 805 of the 943 collisions, accounting for 85.4% of all collisions in which someone was killed. This percentage is slightly lower than for all collisions. The specific causes of fatal collisions were quite different from all collisions. The leading probable cause of fatal collisions was "Exceeded Speed Limit" with 118 collisions (12.5%) and "Failed to Yield Right of Way" was a close second with 114 collisions (12.1%). The next leading causes were "Ran Off Road," "Driver Inattention," and "(Driver) Under the Influence of Alcohol" with 105, 103, and 98 fatal collisions respectively. Taken together, the three "Driver Under the Influence" causes accounted for 125 or just over 13.3% of the fatal collisions. This percentage is down from 1998, when 14.2% of the fatal traffic collisions had a "Driver Under the Influence" as the probable cause. This decrease continues South Carolina's downward trend in alcohol related fatalities. The proportion of "Other Person" (mostly "Pedestrian in Roadway") causes was sharply higher in fatal (9.1%) compared to property damage only collisions (0.4%).

## FIRST HARMFUL EVENT

The first harmful event (FHE) in a traffic collision is defined by the National Safety Council as the first occurrence of injury or damage in a collision. In 1999, the FHE in 83,835 of the 104,484 reported traffic collisions (80.2%) involved some type of collision between a motor vehicle in transit and an object not fixed. The top two FHEs, both involving a collision with an object not fixed, were "Collision with Motor Vehicle in Transport," 63,085 (60.4%) and "Collision with Stopped Vehicle," 13,104 (12.5%). The third FHE was "Ditch" in the "Collision with Fixed Object" group, with 4,940 collisions (4.7%). Combined, these three accounted for more than 3/4 of all reported collisions.

"Collisions with an Object not Fixed" accounted for a substantially smaller percentage of the fatal collisions (54.4%) than the property damage only collisions (82.5%). Collisions involving a "Collision with a Fixed Object" accounted for a substantially greater percentage of the fatal collisions (35.0%) than for property damage only (13.9%). The leading FHE in fatal collisions was "Collision with Motor Vehicle in Transport" with 367 (38.9%); the second leading FHE in fatal collisions was "Collision with Tree" 125 (13.3%).

## MANNER OF COLLISION

The manner of collision refers to the way in which two or more motor vehicles in transport impact each other in the first harmful event of the collision. If the first harmful event does not involve two or more motor vehicles in transit, then the manner of collision is not applicable. If, for example, the first harmful event in a traffic collision involves a motor vehicle colliding with a train, the manner of collision should be "not collision with motor vehicle in transit" since a train is not classified a motor vehicle.

In 1999, the leading manner of collision for all crashes was the angle collision, accounting for more than one third of all reported crashes during the year. This was followed by "rear end" collisions and the "not collision with motor vehicle in transit." By contrast, more than half of the fatal collisions were not a collision between two or more motor vehicles in transit. This is a reflection of the large injury causing potential resulting from collisions between motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles and between trains and motor vehicles.