

## Montana Trooper

# Recipe for Disaster

*By Trooper Rocky Bailey*

Some crashes have multiple factors that combine to contribute to the event. Some factors, such as road design and driver error, lend themselves to predictable negative outcomes. Such was the case in this two vehicle crash which occurred on September 9, 2013, in Ravalli County.

The location is a narrow, two lane county road, devoid of any paint markings and not posted with a numerical speed limit. The particular spot of the collision is at the bottom of a hill with a five percent grade, 165 feet below a blind hill crest.

An eighteen year old male, whose driveway access is at the bottom of this hill, parked his 1968 Ford pickup blocking half of the south bound lane, after which he got out to open his gate on the opposite side of the road.

While this driver was out of his vehicle, a sixteen year old male driving his father's white 2001 Dodge pickup was southbound above the blind hill crest. Despite the blind hillcrest requiring a reduced, prudent speed, the driver of the Dodge approached the hillcrest at around 55 to 60 MPH and was reported by nearby residents to frequently "catch air" when he traveled over the hillcrest.

This time when the Dodge crested the hill and the driver saw the obstruction ahead, the vehicle skidded 162 feet



down the hill before rear-ending the parked pickup below. The Dodge pickup went underneath the Ford pickup, rotated clockwise, and did a half roll, with the two vehicles coming to rest forty-eight feet past the first point of impact. When they came to rest, the rear end of the Ford was on top of the Dodge, which was upside down underneath. The combination of the two vehicles fully blocked the twenty-one foot wide roadway, and the driver of the Dodge was able to extricate himself from his vehicle.

The operator of the Ford was issued notice to appear for stopping, standing, or parking a vehicle with less than 500 feet visibility to approaching drivers, while the driver of the Dodge was issued a notice to appear for reckless driving.

Neighbors in the area said they have known for quite a while that something like this would happen at that location, although none were on record as having talked to the county commissioners about the potential for such a disaster.

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