



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

A medic works on an accident victim as firefighters rush to a burning car that hit a utility pole on northbound I-77 at Morehead Street on Sunday. The driver died at the scene.

Man dies after car hits I-77 pole, burns

By **JERI FISCHER-KRENTZ**
Staff Writer

A man driving north on I-77 Sunday was killed after his car apparently swerved into a light pole and burst into flames.

"You could see sparks coming out of the pole when it hit the car," said Eric McWhorter, a 19-year-old UNC Charlotte student who witnessed the accident. "Then there

was a mild explosion." The unidentified man was apparently able to crawl from his car, but he was badly burned and died at the scene.

The accident happened about 6:30 p.m. at the Morehead Street entrance ramp. The car, with the light pole across its hood, was still smoldering 30 minutes later.

McWhorter, who is from Mon-

roe, was driving north on I-77 with his girlfriend, 16-year-old Ginger Stegall.

"We slammed on the brakes and jumped out to help," McWhorter said. "We tried to do something. But by the time we got there, the car was covered in flames. It was awful."

The N.C. Highway Patrol was still investigating the case early today.

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To Whom It May Concern:

March 6, 1994 my partner and I witnessed a motor vehicle accident, which was one of the worst I have ever been involved with.

It was early evening on Sunday and we had just finished refueling our truck and were heading back to our station. We took interstate loop I-77 in Mecklenburg Co. (Charlotte). As we were topping the hill heading south, just before Freedom Drive exit, We saw a vehicle out of control sliding sideways. The sliding vehicle went off the road and hit a highway light pole approximately center to the passenger side door. The pole broke away and fell across the vehicle. We witnessed electrical sparks around the former base of the pole and under the car immediately after impact. The car in a matter of seconds exploded into flames.

We stopped the ambulance, called for back up, retrieved our turn-out gear and fire extinguisher, then jumped the median ran over to the vehicle, but were unable to get to the patient due to the flames and the electrical sparks that were still present. The patient climbed through the window of the car even though he was fully engulfed in flames at this time. Taking a couple of steps he fell to the ground. It was at this time I noticed all the lights on other poles around us go out all at the same time and the electrical sparks around the pole base and under the car also stopped. We ran around the car and put the fire out on the patient who by this time was unresponsive with 3rd degree burns on 100% of his body.

Unfortunately the patient had no hope for survival. This was by far one of the most gruesome accidents I have witnessed. I have heard of other incidents from many paramedic friends where lighting poles have caused problems and a dangerous environment due to the electrical hazard after Hurricanes, Tornados, Earthquakes, and accidents.

I hope by my sharing this most horrible event that I have shed some light on this problem and that something can be done to prevent future incidents as this one.

This letter is written in behalf of all Mecklenburg Co. Emergency Medical personnel and Fire-fighters.

Mecklenburg County
Emergency Medical Services
EMT-Paramedic Crew Chief