The table on the following pages was prepared in response to frequent questions such as, "What are the odds of being killed by lightning?" or "What are the chances of dying in a plane crash?"

The odds given in the table are statistical averages over the whole U.S. population and do not necessarily reflect the chances of death for a particular person from a particular external cause. Any individual's odds of dying from various external causes are affected by the activities in which they participate, where they live and drive, what kind of work they do, and other factors.

The table has four columns. The first column gives the manner of injury, such as motor vehicle crash, fall, fire, etc. The second column gives the total number of deaths nationwide due to the manner of injury in 2009 (the latest year for which data are available). The third column gives the odds of dying in one year due to the manner of injury. The fourth column gives the lifetime odds of dying from the manner of injury. Statements about the odds or chances of dying from a given cause of death may be made as follows:

- The odds of dying from (manner of injury) in 2009 were 1 in (value given in the "One-year odds" column).
- The lifetime odds of dying from (manner of injury) for a person born in 2009 were 1 in (value given in the "Lifetime odds" column).

For example, referring to the first line of the table:
- The odds of dying from an injury in 2009 were 1 in 1,708.

- The lifetime odds of dying from an injury for a person born in 2009 were 1 in 22.

The one-year odds are approximated by dividing the 2009 population (307,006,550) by the number of deaths. The lifetime odds are approximated by dividing the one-year odds by the life expectancy of a person born in 2009 (78.5 years). Please note that odds based on less than 20 deaths are likely to be unstable from year to year and are therefore not included in the table and figure on the following pages.

The figure on page 43 represents the lifetime odds of death for selected causes from the odds table. The total lifetime odds of death from any cause are 1 in 1, or 100%, and thus the largest rectangle representing the total odds actually extends off the page in all directions to infinity. The rectangles for selected causes are sized according to their relative lifetime probabilities, with the least probable event – death from fireworks discharge – depicted using the smallest box.