

Motorist Awareness

ISSUE STATEMENT

When motorcycles and other vehicles collide, it is usually the other (non-motorcycle) driver who violates the motorcyclist's right-of-way (*NHTSA, 1998*). There is a continuing need to help other motorists "think motorcycles" and to educate motorcyclists to be aware of this problem.

WHERE WE ARE

Several factors combine to cause drivers of other vehicles to overlook motorcyclists and subsequently violate their right-of-way:

- Motorcycles and their riders are a relatively small component of the total traffic mix. Therefore, their visual recognition is reduced.
- Many drivers do not anticipate routine encounters with motorcyclists in traffic.
- Motorcycles are smaller visual targets and are more likely to be obscured.

Research shows drivers who also ride motorcycles and those with family members or close friends who ride are more likely to observe motorcyclists and less likely to collide with them (*Brooks, 1990*). This indicates that drivers can see motorcyclists, whom they might otherwise overlook, if they mentally train themselves to do so. The visual problem is compounded by a variety of visual limitations confronting drivers:

- Automobiles have obstructions and blind spots that can obscure or hide a motorcycle and rider. These include door pillars, passengers' heads, and areas not visible in the mirrors.
- Other conditions affecting the vehicle—such as precipitation, glare, and cargo—can further impair a driver's view and obscure motorcyclists.
- Objects and environmental factors beyond the vehicle, including other vehicles, roadside objects, and light patterns can make it more difficult for drivers to identify motorcyclists in traffic.

Traditional driver distractions, such as passengers, eating, smoking, reading, shaving, applying make-up, and managing audio systems, continue to be a problem and may be increasing as new distractions emerge. Portable phones and other communication devices, and features such as in-vehicle navigation systems, which divert more attention inside the car, may be increasingly distracting drivers.

WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Motorists should be aware of motorcycles and take special care to identify and acknowledge their presence. Motorists should avoid distractions and compensate for visual obstructions.

Motorcyclists should compensate for unaware motorists by increasing their conspicuity (see *Conspicuity, page 49*), lane position, riding with headlights on during daytime, and wearing brightly colored and retro-reflective protective apparel.

HOW TO GET THERE

Both drivers and motorcyclists need to become more aware of the visibility problem. Educating drivers to become more aware of motorcycles and to consistently consider their presence would appear to be a very promising strategy for improvement in this crucial area. Getting drivers to consider the possible presence of motorcycles and the need to look for motorcyclists, situations where motorcycles may be obscured, and techniques for detecting motorcyclists, would be useful in reducing right-of-way violations by other vehicles.

This problem must be addressed on a number of fronts:

- Further research into why motorists fail to see motorcyclists could supply information on how to educate drivers to expect motorcycles to be present and to detect them.
- Mature driver programs that teach older drivers how to deal with their changing abilities should emphasize that motorcyclists may require an additional effort to detect.

- Rider education and training efforts need to continue to emphasize this problem and stress that the rider must assume the responsibility of avoiding a crash situation caused by another motorist. Initial and recurring rider education and training should continue to emphasize that motorists will frequently fail to observe motorcyclists, even though the motorcyclist is in plain view.
- Rider education and training must continue to include training on strategies and techniques for coping with this conspicuity problem.
- All driver education and training (mature driver programs, high schools, remedial programs) should include a component on motorcycle awareness.
- Expand avenues to promote motorists' awareness of motorcyclists through billboards, visitor centers, media, motor vehicle departments, bill statements, banks, grocery stores, gas pumps, etc., where there are "captive audiences."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educate operators of other vehicles to be more conscious of the presence of motorcyclists.
- Remind motorcyclists that they may be overlooked and provide defensive strategies for overcoming this situation.
- Include questions regarding motorcyclists on driver's license tests and include information in driving manuals.
- Include the completion of a motorcyclist awareness class in sanctions against motorists found guilty of violating a motorcyclist's right-of-way.
- Adequate funding needs to be devoted to the development and implementation of motorist awareness issues.

Insurance Industry Involvement

ISSUE STATEMENT

Insurers can provide incentives to encourage and enhance motorcycle safety and can provide information about motorcycle loss data to help determine where future safety measures are needed.

WHERE WE ARE

Insurers employ limited avenues to enhance and encourage motorcycle safety.

- Some insurance companies offer premium discounts for motorcyclists who have taken an MSF-recognized rider training course (see [Rider Education & Training, page 17](#)). Some states also require such incentives (see [Appendix J](#)).
- An inordinate number of motorcycle crashes occur when unlicensed riders are operating the motorcycle. However, not all insurers verify that all operators have a motorcycle license, endorsement, or make a valid endorsement a requirement for the policy to be effective (see [Licensing, page 21](#)).

Motorcycle insurers are not currently required to provide motorcycle-specific loss data for analysis or use in a safety-related database as they are, for example, with automobiles.

WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Insurers could further motorcycling safety efforts and reduce their own losses by supporting certain responsible riding practices with incentives.

- Specify that all users of insured motorcycles must possess a valid motorcycle operator's license for coverage to be effective.
- Provide premium discounts to motorcyclists who have received a certificate of completion or equivalent from an appropriate (i.e., basic or experienced) MSF-recognized rider-training course.

Insurers could help devise safety countermeasures by providing loss information to motorcycle safety and traffic safety organizations.

HOW TO GET THERE

The insurance industry should work with the motorcycling community and other entities concerned with motorcycle safety to understand the loss patterns of motorcycling and reward safe motorcyclists with incentives. Insurers should:

- Offer incentives for rider training.
- Encourage proper licensing for motorcycle operators of insured vehicles and discourage use by improperly licensed operators.
- Create a system for collecting loss data that can be used to devise safety countermeasures.
- Offer insurance discounts for remaining crash-free.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Insurers should write policies that stipulate that coverage or certain portions of coverage are not valid if the owner permits an unlicensed or improperly licensed operator to use the motorcycle.
- Collect, organize, analyze, and distribute motorcycle-specific loss data from insurers to better understand safety issues, and to educate riders and other motorists on motorcycling safety issues.
- Develop guidelines for insurers to tie approved training, licensing, and safe-riding practices to premium reductions.

Enforcement & Adjudication

ISSUE STATEMENT

Law enforcement is responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations intended to promote and maintain highway safety, and is an integral component of motorcycle safety.

WHERE WE ARE

Some law enforcement agencies do not make motorcycle safety a priority and take a traditional approach toward law enforcement relating to motorcycles. For example, because motorcyclists are a small part of the motoring public, few programs are funded that proactively target motorcycles for compliance and safety programs.

Many prosecutors and judges are unaware of the factors that contribute to motorcyclists' injuries and fatalities. Even though violations, such as riding without a motorcycle operator's license, are associated with a significant increase in crashes and injury (*FARS, 1998*), there is little perceived threat for the motorcycle rider of being caught, and even less fear of the consequences.

WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Law enforcement agencies and the courts should recognize the importance of motorcycle safety. Agencies should participate in statewide Motorcycle Safety Program Assessments to maintain comprehensive enforcement and public education programs to enhance motorcycle safety. Enforcement programs should address specific problems related to motorcycles. Prosecutors and judges should be equitable when dealing with motorists who cause motorcycle crashes.

Technical expertise in motorcycle safety and crash investigation should be available to crash investigators. Motorcycle-specific crash investigation training should be more widely available to law enforcement investigative personnel.

HOW TO GET THERE

Judicial and law enforcement agencies and associations should work together to promote motorcycle safety. Law enforcement agencies should involve themselves at all levels of state motorcycle safety programs to better understand the needs and aims of those programs. By coordinating with motorcycle safety organizations and working with other traffic safety groups that already work on motorcycle safety (e.g., AAMVA, MSF, NAGHSR, NHTSA, SMSA), law enforcement and judicial groups could become more aware of and involved in relevant motorcycle safety issues.

There should be a concerted effort to inform and educate law enforcement officers and administrators about other programs designed to address motorcycle safety. Areas to cover include:

- Existing materials—such as NHTSA cue cards with indicators for detecting impaired motorcyclists that differ from those of other impaired motorists—should be widely distributed and utilized.
- Law enforcement officers need the proper tools to fairly and effectively enforce helmet-use laws where applicable (see [Personal Protective Equipment, page 27](#)), such as information on how to differentiate FMVSS 218 compliant helmets from non-compliant helmets.
- Motorists who violate motorcyclists' right-of-way should face legal consequences at least as great as if they had violated an automobile operator's right-of-way. The public should be educated about the danger of overlooking a motorcyclist and the serious legal penalties for doing so.
- Motorcycle crash experts should be available as a resource for police crash investigators to aid in accurate analysis of motorcycle crashes (see [Conveying Research Information to Users, page 13](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educate law enforcement and judicial officials about unique motorcycle safety issues and resources.
- Encourage inclusion of law enforcement officials in Motorcycle Safety Program Assessments.
- Develop and implement standardized data gathering and reporting for motorcycle crashes.
- Include motorcycle crash investigation procedures in the basic course given to crash investigators.
- Appropriate sanctions should be applied to those found guilty of contributing to motorcycle crashes. The sanctions, such as mandatory attendance at a motorcycle awareness course, would be designed to expand knowledge of motorcycle issues.

Traffic Safety Community Attitude

ISSUE STATEMENT

Highway safety organizations throughout the United States, public and private, place less emphasis on motorcycle safety when compared with other modes of transportation.

WHERE WE ARE

Little attention is paid at any level to the impact overall traffic safety has on motorcycle safety.

- The emphasis on motorcycle safety is placed on helmet usage and laws.
- Funding for other motorcycle safety issues is very limited.
- Highway safety publications and public education campaigns rarely focus on motorcycle safety issues.

WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Greater emphasis on motorcycle safety by United States highway safety organizations can advance motorcycle safety efforts in a number of key ways:

- Funding for motorcycle safety programs should be increased.
- Motorcycle safety programs should be more widely publicized and promoted.

HOW TO GET THERE

To give motorcycle safety efforts a new legitimacy and urgency, key leaders in the traffic safety community must be well informed about pertinent issues to help those involved in promoting motorcycle safety receive greater support.

Key leaders in the traffic safety community and the motorcycle community can champion motorcycle safety efforts by working with the appropriate highway safety decision-makers. These efforts should lead to a comprehensive application to promote motorcycle safety that can be applied nationwide.

Develop cooperative arrangements between motorcycle safety advocates and the media to increase publicity surrounding the issue of motorcycle safety and increase public awareness of drivers' responsibility to detect and avoid motorcycles (see [Motorist Awareness, page 31](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Traffic safety organizations outside of the motorcycling community can better influence motorcycle safety issues by becoming more educated about motorcycle safety issues and adopt them where applicable.
- Increase funding for motorcycle safety programs by elevating their importance to state highway safety offices.
- Representatives of the motorcycle safety community should be integrated into the larger highway safety community to improve cooperative efforts.