

Safety Corner (May 2008)

May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is once again promoting the theme “Share the Road.” This effort, although honorable, is not pursued on NHTSA’s own initiative; Public Law 109-59, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) directs the department to develop and provide language for use in traffic safety education courses, driver’s manuals, and other driver’s training materials instructing the drivers of motor vehicles on the importance of sharing the roads safely with motorcycles. Although the language NHTSA develops is directed towards all users of the nation’s roads and highways, it is equally instructive for those of us on two wheels as well.



Motorcycles are vehicles with the same rights and privileges as any motor vehicle on the roadway. Drivers of other passenger vehicles should always remember to follow these steps to help keep motorcyclists safe:

- Allow a motorcyclist the full lane width. Although it may seem as though there is enough room in a traffic lane for both an automobile and a motorcycle, the motorcycle needs the full room to maneuver safely. Do not share the lane.
- Always signal your intentions before changing lanes or merging with traffic. This allows the motorcyclist to anticipate traffic flow and find a safe lane position.

- Remember that motorcyclists are often hidden in a vehicle’s blind spot or missed in a quick look due to their smaller size. Always make a visual check for motorcycles by checking mirrors and blind spots before entering or leaving a lane of traffic and at intersections.
- Don’t be fooled by a flashing turn signal on a motorcycle – motorcycle signals usually are not self-canceling and riders sometimes forget to turn them off. Wait to be sure the motorcycle is going to turn before you proceed.
- Remember that road conditions which are minor annoyances to passenger vehicles pose major hazards to motorcyclists. Be aware that motorcyclists may need to change speed or adjust their position within a lane suddenly in reaction to road and traffic conditions such as potholes, gravel, wet or slippery surfaces, pavement seams, railroad crossings, and grooved pavement.
- Allow more following distance, three or four seconds, when following a motorcycle so the motorcyclist has enough time to maneuver or stop in an emergency. And don’t tailgate. In dry conditions, motorcycles can stop more quickly than cars.

Motorcyclists have responsibilities, too, by following the rules of the roadway, being alert to other drivers, and always wearing protective gear.

Too often, in a crash, the drivers of other vehicles involved say they never saw the motorcyclist and failed to respond in time. This is no excuse. Too many lives are being lost.

The message to all drivers is: Help make this the first year in recent years when motorcycle fatalities do not increase. “Share the Road” with motorcycles.

*-- Greg Drake
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Motorcyclists Are at Risk from Other Drivers

- With warmer weather here, more motorcycles are back out on the road – and the drivers of passenger vehicles need to be alert.
 - Motorcycles are small and may be difficult for drivers of other vehicles to see.
 - Motorcycles have a much smaller profile than other vehicles. This can make it difficult to judge the speed and distance of an approaching motorcycle.
 - After a crash, the drivers of other vehicles involved often say they never saw the motorcyclist and were unable to respond in time.
 - In the event of a crash, a motorcyclist is much more vulnerable and in much greater danger physically than are other vehicle drivers.
 - In fact, per vehicle mile traveled, NHTSA estimates that in 2006, motorcyclists were about 35 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a traffic crash.
- In 2006, 93 percent of all two-vehicle crashes involving a motorcycle and a passenger vehicle in which the motorcycle operator died occurred on non-interstate roadways.
 - In 2006, 51 percent of all two-vehicle crashes involving a motorcycle and a passenger vehicle in which the motorcycle operator died were intersection crashes.
 - In two-vehicle motorcycle crashes involving a motorcycle and another type of vehicle, in 40 percent of the crashes the other vehicle was turning left when the motorcycle was going straight, passing, or overtaking the vehicle.

Motorcyclist Deaths are Rising

- In 2006, motorcycle rider fatalities increased for the ninth straight year.
- During 2006, 4,810 motorcyclists lost their lives in fatal highway crashes.
- That means motorcycle riders were involved in more than one out of nine of all U.S. road fatalities during 2006.
- Fifty-five percent of all fatalities in motorcycle crashes in 2006 involved another vehicle in addition to the motorcycle in the crash.