

Save a Life, Wear a Helmet

By Lauren L., Sewickley, PA

The freedom of the open road reminds motorcyclists of the joy of their bikes. The wind in their face and the openness of the vehicle serve as a harmless escape. But is it really harmless? Motorcycle fatalities are increasing as the number of riders wearing helmets decreases. I believe that federal law should require all motorcyclists to wear a helmet.

Every time bikers get on the road without a helmet, they are putting their life in danger. According to a Weekly Reader article, "The number of motorcycle fatalities has risen every year for the last seven years. In 2004, the increase was nearly 8 percent." And these deaths will continue to rise unless something is done.

It is a fact that fewer fatalities occur when helmets are mandatory. Some states have enacted laws that required helmets, but later repealed those laws. Marian Moser Jones and Ronald Bayer in "Motorcycle Helmet Laws Save Lives," wrote, "In 2003 ... after repeal of helmet laws, there was a 50 percent increase in fatalities in Kentucky and a 100 percent increase in fatalities in Louisiana."

Meanwhile in Europe, the opposite has been happening. When European countries passed a law requiring helmets, deaths and injuries decreased by 30 percent. These statistics prove that helmet laws are beneficial and necessary.

Not only can helmets save lives; they can also save taxpayers money. Jones and Bayer's article highlights the high cost of motorcycle accidents: "This cost calculation incorporated direct costs (emergency services, hospital, and medical expenses, legal and funeral expenses, and insurance and government administrative costs) and indirect costs (the value of the lost earnings and services due to the death of the person). The researchers found that the costs totaled at least \$176.6 million." Most Americans are all about saving money, and if a law can do that and save lives, everyone should support it.

Opponents of a helmet law argue that motorcyclists who do not wear protective gear are not risking the lives of others, just their own. So the choice should be theirs. Well, if you don't wear a seatbelt, you are only risking your own life, but regardless, buckling up is still the law. Also, Don Smith wrote in *Motorcyclist* magazine that "Road racers wear ear protection not only to prevent hearing loss, but also to fight fatigue and stress caused by constant wind and bike noise, which can slow their reflexes and hinder concentration." Consequently, not wearing a helmet can lead to lack of focus and trouble hearing, which could cause a motorcyclist to crash into another vehicle, thus endangering others.

It is clear that the law should require motorcyclists to wear helmets. Write your state representative or senator about the importance of passing this law. You could help save lives.


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