



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of STATE MOTORCYCLE SAFETY ADMINISTRATORS

The SMSA is dedicated to serving the needs and interests of state motorcycle safety administrators and programs by advocating motorcycle safety and fostering and promoting the exchange of ideas and resources.

MOTORCYCLE CULTURE

1. *We need to educate riders about their responsibility in car-motorcycle crashes.* Riders are quick to point to other drivers as the problem, but crash data shows single- vs. multi-vehicle crashes are actually about 50/50. That is, half of all motorcycle crashes do not involve another moving vehicle. And in any multi-vehicle crash, all parties involved *share* responsibility. This would imply that motorcyclists are at least 75 percent responsible for their own outcomes.

2. *Highway safety offices need to understand that mandatory helmet laws are not "the silver bullet."* Nor should rider training be the only motorcycle safety effort. Strategic planning should include motorcycle safety problem identification that includes greater emphasis on crashes and injuries (and not just fatalities), as well as comprehensive countermeasures such as impaired riding enforcement, stricter licensing standards, rider education, and public awareness.

3. *We need to set behavioral expectations of motorcycle riders.* The key factors in motorcycle crashes, such as speed, inexperience, inattention, impairment, unlicensed riders, aggressive driving, lack of riding gear, etc. need to be viewed as taboos, not norms. The desired behavior should be consistently modeled by safety professionals, reinforced by rider education activities, and supported by the riding community, law enforcement, courts, legislatures, and the public.

4. *The voice of the independent riders and riding groups needs to be heard.* Federal policy makers and legislators need to hear from independent less structured motorcyclist groups with an active interest in motorcycle safety. Separating the "freedom of choice" argument from the greater discussion of how to reduce crashes and save lives may be a better approach to instigate change.

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Understanding the problems that face motorcycle riders is one thing; solving them is quite another. It is important to remember that driving a motor vehicle in the United States is a privilege, and not a right. If an individual wants to use public roadways, he or she should be educated, trained, and qualified to do so—and commit to doing so in a way that is both safe and accepted by society.

A change in the culture of motorcycle riders will require an honest assessment of the problems facing motorcycle safety, a commitment to reducing crashes, injuries, and fatalities, and countermeasures supported by data, the riding community, and the general public. And until we discard our assumptions about the motorcycle problem and address the facts, positive change will be beyond our grasp.

**SMSA would like to acknowledge and thank Pat Hahn, MN Motorcycle Safety Center for writing this article. He reviewed the comments from the membership and put it together for this article.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

The SMSA Executive Committee would like to take this time to extend our wishes to you and your family during this holiday season.

Stay safe.

Carol Thurn, Chair

