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Motorcycle crash rate declines but there's still work to do

Governor Kitzhaber proclaims May 2011 as Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month

The good news is the number of motorcycle crash fatalities dropped to their lowest level since 2004; the bad news is that 38 people lost their lives in motorcycle crashes in 2010 according to preliminary data from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Governor Kitzhaber has proclaimed May 2011 "Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month" in Oregon. Oregon is joining with motorcycle organizations and other federal, state and local highway safety and law enforcement organizations to raise awareness about motorcycle safety.

New report shows motorcycle fatalities on the decline nationally

A recent report released by the Governors Highway Safety Association reveals that motorcycle fatalities declined in 2010 by at least 2 percent. GHSA is projecting declines in approximately half of the states, with Oregon mentioned specifically as having a notable decline.

ODOT Transportation Safety Division Administrator and GHSA Vice Chair Troy Costales credits Oregon's strong training program and new laws in part for the reduction in fatalities. He adds, "Oregon has worked successfully with our motorcycle clubs, who are effective advocates for riding safe and sober."

Laws focus on safety and training

Oregon is a national leader in motorcycle safety education, program administration and licensing practices. The 2009 Oregon Legislature passed several motorcycle safety related laws in an effort to improve safety. In 2010, the penalty for riding without a motorcycle endorsement changed from a Class B (minimum \$360) to a Class A (minimum \$720) violation. The number of unendorsed motorcycle riders killed in crashes dropped from 33 percent in 2009 to 18 percent in 2010.

Changes were also made to Oregon's motorcycle training requirements, requiring new motorcycle riders to complete an ODOT-approved training course. The law has a five year phase-in period based on the age of the rider. As of January 2011, new riders age 30 and under must complete a basic or intermediate rider training course. Additional age groups will be phased-in each year until 2015 when all new riders

must take training. Almost 60 percent of fatal motorcycle crashes are single vehicle crashes, meaning another vehicle wasn't involved in the crash. The hope is that as more people go through training, the number of crashes will decline.

"Clearly, training, which helps riders anticipate and avoid trouble, is indispensable," said Governor's Advisory Committee on Motorcycle Safety Chairperson David Peterson.

Share the road safely

"Oregon has made significant progress in motorcycle safety, but we need everyone's help to make the number of crashes go down," said Michele O'Leary, Motorcycle Safety Program manager for the Oregon Department of Transportation. "It doesn't matter if you're on four wheels or two; we all have to do our part to share the road safely."

ODOT offers safety tips for drivers and motorcyclists:

Drivers

- Remember, motorcycles are vehicles with all of the rights and privileges of any other motor vehicle on the roadway. Always allow a motorcyclist the full lane width—never try to share a lane.
- Always make a visual check for motorcycles by checking mirrors and blind spots before entering or leaving a lane of traffic and at intersections.
- Always signal your intentions before changing lanes or merging with traffic.
- Remember that road conditions, which are minor annoyances to passenger vehicles, pose major hazards to motorcyclists.
- 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. Don't tailgate.

Motorcyclists

- Always wear a helmet and protective clothing.
- Allow time and space to react to other motorists or changing road conditions.
- Always signal your intentions before changing lanes or merging with traffic.
- Don't speed.
- Motorcycle rider training and education save lives. TEAM OREGON offers classes for beginner to advanced riders.

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Editors: May is also Transportation Safety Month. Motorcycle Awareness Month and Transportation Safety Month resources including copies of the Governor's proclamations, are available online at www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM.