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Motorcycle Fatalities Reach Record High in Colorado
State encourages riders to get training and motorists to be more aware

DENVER – Traffic safety officials in Colorado are alarmed at the continued rise in motorcycle fatalities in the state, which reached a record high in 2008. Last year, 98 motorcycle riders and passengers died on Colorado roadways, up from 90 in 2007. Motorcycle fatalities represented 18% of the 548 traffic deaths in Colorado last year, despite representing only 3% of registered vehicles.

“As the weather heats up, and more motorcyclists hit Colorado roadways, we ask motorists to be aware and look out for riders around them,” said Pamela Hutton, Governor’s Representative for Highway Safety at the Colorado Department of Transportation. “We also strongly encourage all motorcyclists – no matter how long they’ve been riding – to take a training course and wear proper gear, including a helmet. As a motorcyclist myself, I know the thrill and freedom of riding, but I also realize the importance of safety gear and the benefits of learning new riding skills to keep safe.”

Nearly 7 out of 10 riders killed in Colorado last year were not wearing a helmet or were wearing it incorrectly. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that helmets are 37% effective in preventing fatal injuries, meaning 25 Colorado riders could have been saved if they had been wearing one.

Lack of training is also a factor in Colorado’s fatal motorcycle crashes. Motorcycle riders were found to be at fault in 80% of the fatal crashes. Also, 39% of riders killed did not have a motorcycle endorsement on their driver’s license or no license at all.

“To be a legal motorcycle rider in Colorado, you must have the proper endorsement on your driver’s license,” said Col. James Wolfinbarger, chief of the Colorado State Patrol. “But even with an endorsement, make sure you take a training class to build your riding skills, no matter what your age or how long you’ve been riding.”

Older riders are at highest risk for dying in a motorcycle crash. Riders age 45 and older represented 39% of Colorado’s motorcycle fatalities in 2008. But the largest jump in fatalities came in the 18 to 34 age group, comprising 36% of motorcycle fatalities, up 40 percent from 2007.

To provide high-quality motorcycle training at a low cost, CDOT oversees a state-funded motorcycle training program called MOST (Motorcycle Operator Safety Training). The MOST program requires trainers to use an approved motorcycle curriculum, and sets standards for proper training facilities and qualified trainers. A list of the state’s MOST-certified trainers can be found at www.CoMotorcycleSafety.com. Colorado residents and active-duty military personnel qualify for MOST. Riders who pass a MOST class can simply take their completion card to a state driver’s license office to get their endorsement with no further testing needed.

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To further encourage motorcycle training, the Colorado State Patrol's Motorcycle Operations Unit will travel to several motorcycle events across the state this summer in a newly designed motorcycle trailer, which will not only act as a mobile billboard to encourage training, but also an informational booth to display at rallies.

"We hope that by directly reaching out to the riding community, and sharing our experience as fellow motorcyclists, we will encourage more people to take a riding course that could one day save their lives," said Capt. Matthew Secor, CSP Motorcycle Unit.

Impaired riding is also a major problem. Over one-third of riders killed in motorcycle crashes in 2008 were under the influence of alcohol. "It is extremely dangerous to drive any vehicle while impaired, especially a motorcycle, which requires a great deal of balance and coordination," said Chief Wolfenbarger. "But no matter what you drive, it is a crime to do it under the influence of alcohol or drugs and you will get caught and arrested."

Throughout the spring and summer, CDOT will continue its *Live to Ride* motorcycle campaign that launched last year. The *Live to Ride* campaign includes a Web site, www.CoMotorcycleSafety.com, which specifically addresses rider and motorist safety issues, including riding under the influence, use of proper gear, and tips for motorists.

Safety officials stress the importance of all vehicles sharing the road. Motorists should actively search for motorcyclists at all times. Experts offer the following tips for drivers:

- 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 allow a motorcyclist the full lane width – never try to share a lane.
- Always signal your intentions before changing lanes or merging with traffic.
- Allow more following distance, three or four seconds, when behind 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.

In addition to taking a training course, experts say motorcyclists can increase their safety by following these tips:

- Wear brightly colored protective gear and a DOT-compliant helmet. Red, yellow, orange and white are highly visible and help a rider stand out.
- Strategically use your lane position to see and be seen.
- Use turn signals for every turn or lane change, even if you think no one will see it.
- Use reflective tape and stickers to make you more visible to other motorists.
- Combine hand and turn signals to draw more attention to yourself.

"Ultimately, we ask that motorists and motorcycle riders share responsibility to increase safety and save lives in Colorado. Let's make this the first year in recent years when motorcycle fatalities do not increase," said Hutton.

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