



News Release

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Contact: Jonathan Adkins
202-789-0942

New Report Examines Alarming Increase in Motorcycle Rider Deaths

Explosion in motorcycle sales, training shortfalls, licensing issues, decline in helmet use are key issues

Washington, D.C.— Friday marks the official start of summer, and millions of Americans will hit the roads to head to their summer vacations. Unfortunately, for too many motorcyclists, this may also mark the beginning of another deadly summer. The Governors Highway Safety Association's (GHSA) new report, *Survey of the States: Motorcycle Safety Programs*, examines the dramatic increase in motorcycle rider deaths and looks at programs states have undertaken to keep motorcyclists safe.

In the report, *Survey of the States: Motorcycle Safety Programs*, GHSA notes that motorcycle fatalities in 2006 increased for the ninth straight year—more than doubling from 2,110 in 1997 to 4,810 in 2006. In fact, GHSA's analysis of federal data shows that motorcycle fatalities increased in 27 states and Puerto Rico between 2005 and 2006. In 2006, 67 percent of all motorcycle fatalities occurred in 15 states. Also noteworthy is the fact that in 2004, 2005 and 2006 nearly one third of all fatalities occurred in California, Texas and Florida alone.

In 2007, GHSA asked state highway safety agencies to complete a survey detailing motorcycle safety activities designed to mitigate or reverse the annual increase in motorcycle crashes. Fifty states plus the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico completed surveys. The report found that:

- **A patchwork of helmet laws, scant enforcement and a lack of helmet promotion exist despite clear evidence that proper helmet use saves lives.** Twenty states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have universal motorcycle helmet laws. Twenty-seven states and Guam have laws that cover certain riders, and three states have no motorcycle helmet laws. In states with partial laws or without helmet laws, most riders who died were not wearing helmets. Only nine states and Puerto Rico indicated special efforts to help law enforcement identify helmets that don't meet safety standards. Although it is widely accepted that proper helmet use dramatically reduces the likelihood of a

- fatality in a crash, only 17 states reported special efforts to promote the benefits of helmet use and other protective gear.
- **An explosion in motorcycle ownership has left states with training and education shortfalls.** Motorcycle sales almost quadrupled from 1997 to 2006, from 356,000 to almost 1.1 million. As a result, 29 states and D.C. indicated they have capacity problems with delays ranging from one day to 12 weeks for training classes. Only three states, Florida, Maine and Rhode Island require rider education for all riders, regardless of age.
 - **Motorcycle licensing requirements vary widely.** Across the country, the minimum age for a motorcycle license/endorsement ranges from 14 to 18. Unlike automobile drivers, motorcyclists in at least 33 states may have licensing tests waived for completion of a rider training course.
 - **Many motorcyclists drive without valid licenses.** In 2006, 25 percent of operators in fatal motorcycle crashes did not have a valid motorcycle license, compared to 13 percent of drivers of passenger vehicles.
 - **Road construction issues are addressed in only a few states.** Although motorcycle riders and their passengers are vulnerable to hazardous road conditions, only 21 states and Puerto Rico currently consider motorcycle issues in road construction projects.
 - **Funding shortfalls are commonplace.** Only 24 states reported that user fees alone support their motorcycle safety/education efforts. In 18 states, programs are supported by a combination of one or more of the following: user fees, dedicated state funding and federal grants. Three states only use federal money.

According to GHSA Chairman Christopher J. Murphy, “This report is the most complete effort to date that examines how states are dealing with the problem of motorcycle safety. Clearly, more work must be done.” Murphy adds that the timing of the report is key given that Congress will be soon be reauthorizing surface transportation programs, including those funding motorcycle safety. “We know that we need more funding and also greater flexibility with those funds to promote countermeasures that clearly work, such as helmet use.”

Murphy also says this report serves as a reminder to share the road, particularly as we start the summer driving season. “While the large majority of motorcycle crashes are single vehicle, other vehicles are a factor in 40 percent of all fatal motorcycle crashes, so this is an issue that impacts us all.” Tips for sharing the road with motorcycles are available online at www.ghsa.org.

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Survey of the States: Motorcycle Safety Programs is available online at www.ghsa.org. State-by-state responses are included. A limited number of print copies are available by e-mailing Jonathan Adkins (jadkins@ghsa.org).