



News Release

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Contact: Kara Macek, 202-789-0942
202-262-4889 (mobile)
kmacek@ghsa.org

Motorcyclist Fatalities Projected to Drop for 2nd Straight Year

Preliminary data show a decrease, but fatality rates continue to outpace those of other motor vehicles

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As hundreds of thousands of motorcyclists gather in Washington D.C. for the annual Rolling Thunder "Ride for Freedom" this Memorial Day Weekend, the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSAs) is projecting that motorcyclist fatalities decreased for the second straight year in 2014, based on preliminary state data. However, this latest [Spotlight on Highway Safety report](#) also notes that there is much more work to do: motorcyclist fatalities are 26 percent higher than a decade ago, while other motor vehicle fatalities are 28 percent lower.

GHSAs has produced motorcyclist fatality trend reports annually since 2010, which provide an early look at current data and developing issues. Adjusting the numbers to account for underreporting, GHSAs projects the final motorcyclist fatality total for 2014 will be 4,584 - approximately 1.8 percent less than the 4,668 recorded in 2013. This will be the second straight year in which this number has decreased, and only the third decrease since 1997.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia provided preliminary motorcyclist fatality counts for the first nine months of 2014. Compared with the first nine months of 2013, motorcyclist fatalities decreased in 27 states, increased in 19 states, and remained the same in four states plus the District of Columbia. The report was authored by Dr. Allan Willams, former chief scientist at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

While the projected decline in motorcyclist fatalities is good news, the report points out that motorcycle safety progress lags behind that of other motor vehicles. For example, in 2013, the rate of motorcyclist fatalities per registered vehicle was about the same as in 1997, whereas during that time period the rate of fatalities per passenger vehicle dropped 66 percent. Safety improvements to passenger vehicles, such as structural improvements to vehicle design, increases in seat belt use, electronic stability controls and policies such as graduated driver licensing, account for a large portion of the decline in passenger vehicles but do not impact motorcyclists.

There is little evidence that risk factors for motorcyclists have been reduced in recent years, and fluctuations in motorcyclist fatalities are likely to have more to do with economic factors and weather patterns affecting exposure.

"We are glad to see a continued decrease in motorcyclist fatalities, but the number of motorcyclist deaths on our roadways is still unacceptable," said [Kendell Poole, GHSAs Chairman and Director of the Tennessee Office of Highway Safety](#). "While we support technology advances such as antilock

brake systems and traction control, state laws and behavioral changes are critical to saving more motorcyclist lives."

Poole emphasized the importance of all states adopting universal helmet laws and notes, "By far, helmets are the single most effective way to prevent serious injury and death in the event of a motorcycle crash."

Currently, only [19 states and D.C. require all riders be helmeted](#). Another 28 mandate helmet use by riders younger than age 18 or 21, and three have no requirement. According to a 2014 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) study, the use rate of helmets in universal law states was 89 percent, compared with 48 percent in all other states.

In addition to increasing helmet use, the report also recommends that states focus on motorcycle safety programs that:

- Reduce alcohol impairment. In 2013, 28 percent of fatally injured riders had a blood alcohol concentration above the legal limit of .08.
- Reduce speeding. According to the most recent data, 34 percent of riders involved in fatal crashes were speeding, compared with 21 percent for passenger vehicle drivers.
- Ensure motorcyclists are properly licensed. In 2013, 25 percent of motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes did not have a valid motorcycle license, compared to 13 percent of passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes.
- Encourage all drivers to share the road with motorcyclists. According to NHTSA, when motorcycles crash with other vehicles, the other driver is often at fault. Many states conduct "share the road" campaigns to increase awareness of motorcyclists.

States conduct much of their motorcycle safety programming through federal safety grants administered by NHTSA. Currently, Congress restricts state programs by permitting them to address only motorcyclist training and programs that encourage drivers to share the road with motorcyclists. GHSA has been a strong advocate for broadening these parameters to give states more flexibility to fund effective approaches to addressing motorcyclist safety, such as efforts to increase helmet use and reduce drunk riding.

All 2014 data in the report are preliminary. The report presents data through September 2014. State-by-state data and image files are available from GHSA.

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About GHSA

The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) is a nonprofit association representing the highway safety offices of states, territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. GHSA provides leadership and representation for the states and territories to improve traffic safety, influence national policy, enhance program management and promote best practices. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans. Contact GHSA at 202-789-0942 or visit www.ghsa.org. Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GHSAhq. Follow us on Twitter at [@GHSAHQ](https://twitter.com/GHSAHQ).