



02-01

STATEMENT OF POLICY

MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports legislation requiring all motorcycle operators and passengers to wear a helmet while riding a motorcycle. NACCHO urges local health officials to support this issue by working with state legislatures to enact such legislation. Furthermore, NACCHO encourages the U.S. Department of Transportation to reinstate the requirement that states enact motorcycle helmet laws in order to receive U.S. Transportation road construction money.

Justification

Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of all injury deaths and the leading cause of death for the age group 4-34. Motor vehicle crashes are the eighth largest cause of all deaths in the United States.¹ Per vehicle mile traveled in 2004, motorcyclists were about 34 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a motor vehicle traffic crash and 8 times more likely to be injured.²

Helmets are estimated to be 37 percent effective in preventing fatal injuries to motorcyclists. In addition, head injuries are a leading cause of death in motorcycle crashes, and using a helmet is the single most critical factor in preventing or reducing head injuries.³ Motorcycle helmets are 67 percent effective in preventing brain injuries and un-helmeted motorcyclists involved in crashes were more than three times more likely to suffer brain injuries than those wearing helmets.³

Unhelmeted motorcycle riders are more likely to be uninsured riders and the cost of inpatient care for brain injuries sustained by motorcyclists is more than twice the cost of receiving inpatient care for other motorcycle-related injuries.⁴

In 1976, Congress amended the Highway Safety Act to remove sanctions against States without motorcycle helmet laws. Between 1976 and 1980, motorcycle fatalities increased 61 percent while motorcycle registrations increased only 15 percent in comparison with 1975, the year before repeals began.⁵ Currently, 27 states only have laws covering some riders, usually people younger than 18. Illinois, Iowa, and New Hampshire do not have helmet laws.⁶

Record of Action

Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors

February 28, 2002

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¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention, Leading Causes of Death Report. (2003).

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Traffic Safety Facts, Motorcycles, 2005 Data*.

³ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Traffic Safety Facts, Motorcycle Helmet Use Laws*. (March 2005).

⁴ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Without Motorcycle Helmets We All Pay the Price*. (Feb. 1999).

⁵ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Traffic Safety Facts, Motorcycle Helmet Use Laws*. (April 2004).

⁶ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, *Helmet Use Laws*. (June 2007).