



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY
GOVERNOR

LYNDO TIPPETT
SECRETARY

Release: IMMEDIATE

Phone: (919) 733-3083

Cell: (919) 291-7781

Contact: Beth Horner, Communications Officer

E-mail: bhorner@dot.state.nc.us

GOV. EASLEY PROCLAIMS APRIL 21-25 MOTORCYCLE SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK

RALEIGH—Spring means warm weather and the seasonal return of motorcycles on North Carolina's highways. Gov. Mike Easley has proclaimed April 21-25 as Motorcycle Safety Awareness Week to remind both motorcyclists and other drivers of the importance of motorcycle safety and sharing the road.

"Motorcycle fatalities are at an all-time high," Governor's Highway Safety Program Director Darrell Jernigan said. "We must educate both bikers and other drivers about the importance of motorcycle safety and being alert to their surroundings."

According to the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles, North Carolina had 183 motorcycle rider fatalities in 2007, up from 61 in 1997. This is a 200 percent increase, compared to a 140 percent increase nationally for the same time period. Mild weather, which allows for extended riding seasons, and a 17 percent increase in motorcycle registrations over the past two years, among other factors, have contributed to this increase.

Motorcycles represent 1.96 percent of all registered vehicles in North Carolina, but account for nearly 12 percent of all traffic fatalities, according to DMV. North Carolina has more than 190,000 registered motorcycles and 500,000 licensed drivers who have either a motorcycle endorsement or a motorcycle learner's permit.

This week precedes the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, which is held in May.

The Governor's Highway Safety Program offers the following tips to motorcyclists and other drivers.

Motorcycles:

- **Always wear a Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 218 helmet. It is the law in North Carolina.** A motorcycle rider not wearing a helmet is five times more likely to sustain a critical head injury than a helmeted rider.
- **Be visible at all times.** This includes wearing bright or reflective clothing.

Other drivers:

- **Share the road.** Motorcyclists have the right to a full lane.
- **Stay alert.** Be aware that motorcycles can be easily hidden in a car's blind spot; take an extra moment to thoroughly check traffic when changing lanes.
- **Keep a safe distance.** Allow more following distance behind motorcycles.
- **Be cautious.** Be aware that turn signals on a motorcycle are not self-canceling, thus some riders sometimes forget to turn them off after a turn or lane change.

For more information regarding motorcycle safety, call Beth Horner with the Governor's Highway Safety Program at (919) 733-3083, or visit their Web site at www.ncdot.org/programs/ghsp.

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