

MOTORCYCLE CRASH CAUSATION STUDY UPDATE

As promised, the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) is closely following the progress of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) ongoing motorcycle crash causation study. Vehicle fatalities fell last year, while motorcycle fatalities rose. We all know that a large factor in the increase was the record motorcycle registrations and motorcycle sales, but no one is certain why a lot of motorcycle accidents occur. The last crash study done for motorcycles was in the 1970s, and so much has changed since then that the motorcycle safety community has aggressively pushed for a more up-to-date, relevant study.

"Having a better understanding of what causes these crashes will help us improve roadway safety for everyone," said FHWA Administrator Mendez. "Keeping people safe on America's roads is Secretary LaHood's top priority at the Department of Transportation."

The motorcycle crash causation study will be the federal government's first major in-depth analysis of motorcycle safety in nearly three decades. A provision in the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU) requires the study, which will be conducted by the FHWA in partnership with Oklahoma State University (OSU).

OSU houses one of the U.S. Department of Transportation's 10 National University Transportation Centers, and it receives federal grants to conduct transportation research. One of the holdups of the study was that OSU was required to secure funds to match the \$3 million provided by the Feds. OSU did not have an extra \$3 million, so a waiver was granted allowing the study to move forward with a smaller budget. The study won't be as large as the original concept, but the MRF has been assured it will be rigorous and scientific.

Researchers will evaluate data from hundreds of motorcycle crashes to help identify common factors - including road configurations, environmental conditions and rider experience. The study's focus is to look at how these factors may be affected by countermeasures that, if effectively implemented, will prevent motorcycle crashes or lessen the harm when they occur.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducted a pilot study to develop the protocols for the full-scale causation research. NHTSA also was responsible for the earlier motorcycle causation study, which was completed in 1981.

Between 1997 and 2008, motorcycle rider fatalities increased from 2,116 to 5,290 - a 150 percent jump, according to U.S. Department of Transportation's Fatality Analysis Reporting System. In 2008 alone, deaths due to motorcycle crashes rose by an estimated 2.2 percent while all other vehicle classes saw reductions in fatalities.

Results of the current study are still 3-4 years away.