



Adults make up majority of people killed in N.J. bike crashes

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A national safety group said that the majority of cyclists who've died in fatal accidents nationally in the past two years are adult riders.

While cycling deaths have increased 16 percent nationally between 2010 and 2012, the Governor's Highway Safety Association's report found that the state's fatality rate has been relatively stable, with 14 fatalities reported in 2012. So far, 8 cyclists have been killed this year, according to state police statistics.

California had 123 people killed in cycling accidents, the highest number in the country, followed by Florida with 120 and New York with 45, which were among the top four states for cyclist deaths in that time period,

"It's stayed flat and low compared to other states," said Zach Hosseini, a spokesman for state Division of Highway Traffic Safety. "While 14 deaths is too many, we're doing a good job."

But New Jersey mirrors the national trend that adult riders make up the majority of those killed in crashes. Nationally, GHSA found that more adult riders are being killed in accidents with 84 percent of those riders age 20 and older. That trend also is being seen in New Jersey.

Of the 14 cyclists who died in New Jersey in 2012, 11 were over age 20, state police statistics showed. Of the 17 killed in 2011, 16 were over age 20. By comparison, the report found that the number of people age 20 and younger who were killed in cycling accidents has decreased from 50 percent in 2003 to 34 percent in 2012.

The number of cyclists killed in motor vehicle crashes nationwide increased from 621 in 2010 to 680 in 2011 and 722 in 2012, which is based on federal fatality statistics.

The report also sounds a warning for the future, noting that cycling is increasing and that may be reflected by an increase in fatal crashes, the report said.

The easiest way to reduce deaths and accidents is enforce laws that cover both cyclists and drivers, said Cyndi Steiner, New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition executive director. But civilians and police have to know what the law says first.

"Enforcement of current laws directed at both drivers and cyclists is the easiest first step," Steiner said. "But we continually see that the police are not aware of the laws that dictate cyclists' use of the road, and both cyclists and drivers tend to get away with dangerous behavior."

Infrastructure such as separated bike lanes, protected bike lanes, and signs that "reflects cyclists' legitimate use of the road," would help, Steiner said.

One proposal to require drivers to leave four feet of space between their vehicle and cyclists and pedestrians they're passing was approved by the state assembly in June. That bill has to be acted on by the state senate and sign by the governor to become law.

Steiner said 69 percent of the states with decreases or no change in bicycle fatalities have some type of safe passing law. By comparison, of the 22 states where cyclist fatality rates increased, 64% currently have a safe passing law, she said.

The report determined that more than two-thirds of the cyclists killed in 2012 weren't wearing helmets. One quarter of the adults involved in fatal crashes were riding under the influence, the association found.

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