

Bicycle Safety During National Distracted Driver Awareness Month

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Bicycling remains a favorite form of exercise for a lot of people in the US. In 2018, cyclists in the US increased to an all-time high of 47.88 million which includes riders as young as age 6. Whether you have training wheels or a full suspension mountain bike, cyclists enjoy riding in all our communities across West Virginia and beyond. As the summer brings a peak number of cyclists in our neighborhoods and along our roadways, this an opportune time to discuss safety for cyclists and motorists.

In 2018, 857 bicyclists were killed in traffic crashes in the United States with Florida leading the nation on a per capita basis. The most recent data suggests the average age of bicyclists killed in motor vehicle crashes is 47 years old. Regardless of season, bicyclist deaths occurred most often between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration's (NHTSA) bicycle safety initiatives focus on encouraging safer choices on the part of bicyclists and drivers to help reduce deaths and injuries on our roads. For cyclists, it is critical that you wear a properly fitting helmet and remember that all states require bicyclists on the roadway to follow the same rules and responsibilities as motorists. The NHTSA also recommends the following for safe cycling practices before and during each ride:

1. Ride a bike that fits you—if it's too big, it's harder to control the bike.
2. Ride a bike that works—it really doesn't matter how well you ride if the brakes don't work.
3. Wear equipment to protect you and make you more visible to others, like a bike helmet, bright clothing (during the day), reflective gear, and a white front light and red rear light and reflectors on your bike (at night, or when visibility is poor).
4. Ride one per seat, with both hands on the handlebars, unless signaling a turn.
5. Carry all items in a backpack or strapped to the back of the bike.
6. Tuck and tie your shoelaces and pant legs so they don't get caught in your bike chain.

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7. Plan your route—if driving as a vehicle on the road, choose routes with less traffic and slower speeds. Your safest route may be away from traffic altogether, in a bike lane or on a bike path.

Also, it is important that cyclists drive in the same direction of traffic and obey all street signs, signals, and road markings, just like an automobile. Avoiding distractions such as music, texting, and headphones are equally important for cyclists as for the operator of an automobile.

By law, bicycles on the roadway are vehicles with the same rights and responsibilities as motorized vehicles. For this reason, it is important for drivers to remember they must share the road and treat bicyclists with the appropriate level of respect and operate at a safe distance as if the bicycle were another vehicle. The NHTSA has published very helpful safety guidelines to assist drivers that encounter a cyclist in their neighborhood or roadway:

1. Yield to bicyclists as you would motorists and do not underestimate their speed. This will help avoid turning in front of a bicyclist traveling on the road or sidewalk, often at an intersection or driveway.
2. In parking lots, at stop signs, when packing up, or when parking, search your surroundings for other vehicles, including bicycles.
3. Drivers turning right on red should look to the right and behind to avoid hitting a bicyclist approaching from the right rear. Stop completely and look left-right-left and behind before turning right on red.
4. Obey the speed limit, reduce speed for road conditions and drive defensively to avoid a crash with a cyclist.
5. Give cyclists room. Do not pass too closely. Pass bicyclists as you would any other vehicle—when it's safe to move over into an adjacent lane.

We expect cyclists to be more prevalent on our roadways this spring and summer as sales have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cyclists and drivers must work together to avoid distractions, maintain safe distances, and remain vigilant for each other to ensure everyone makes it home safely. At Bailey Glasser, we have attorneys and staff that are avid cyclists and we understand the risks and rewards that comes with riding. If you or a loved one have been injured while cycling please contact our attorneys for a free consultation.

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