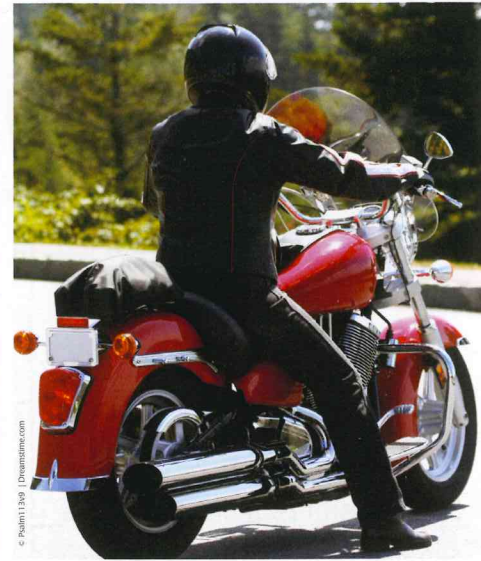


Rights *and* Responsibilities



With the bleak winter weather behind us, most people living in Central Illinois are ready to spend time outside in the sunshine.

This means we'll see an increase in bicycle, motorcycle, and boat traffic. As fun as these activities can be, it's important for everyone to understand the risks involved with each, the laws that have been put into place for our protection, and some simple safety measures that can help prevent needless tragedy.

Bicycles – A Bicycle Built for Two

Bicycles are a great way for families to get some physical activity and a back-to-the-basics way to get from one place to another when weather permits. But cycling is a pastime that comes with risks. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that nearly 43,000 bicyclists were injured in traffic in 2007, with 698 fatalities. Surveys confirm that the most serious injuries are often the result of head trauma. In short, wear a helmet!

- Illinois lawmakers are considering Senate Bill 2627 that could result in some significant changes to the current Illinois Vehicle Code. The one most affecting families would be a law requiring all persons under the age of 16 riding a bike to wear a helmet.
- As you break out the bikes for the season, it's also a good idea to brush up on the rules of the road for cyclists. Make sure everyone in your family understands the same traffic rules that apply for motorists also apply to bicyclists. Do your children understand that they must ride with the traffic, not against it? Do they understand the concept of right-of-way?
- Take the necessary steps to stay visible, with the appropriate reflector lights and brightly-colored, reflective clothing.
- A quick word about those gas or electric bicycles: a person must be at least 16 years of age to operate one of these. These fun biking options may not be driven on sidewalks and should not legally go over 20 miles per hour.

Motorcycles – Get Your Motors Running!

Motorcycles have long been romanticized by the media as a symbol of freedom and adventure, but the sad truth is that 96,000 motorcyclists were injured in 2008, with 5,290 fatalities in the United States. These numbers from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration should serve as a wake-up call for motorcyclists and car drivers alike, who must always accommodate one another on the road. The top causes of motorcycle accidents are speeding, inattention and aggressive driving.

Although safety helmets for motorcyclists are not required in Illinois, consider this: helmets reduce the risk of death by 29 percent and are 67 percent effective in preventing brain injuries to motorcycle riders (NHTSA, 2001).

The good news is that the State of Illinois has made the process of getting a motorcycle endorsement on a driver's license fairly demanding, with a number of steps and precautions. The Illinois Department of Transportation encourages all new motorcycle operators to enroll in the 20-hour Motorcycle Rider Course. It's free and well worth the time.

All motorists should keep in mind the following truths about motorcycles:

- Motorcycles respond differently than cars to traffic, weather, and road conditions.
- Nearly half of all motorcycle collisions occur in intersections.
- Motorcycles are harder to see and their turn signal lights don't turn off on their own. Watch carefully!
- Commonly, drivers of vehicles don't notice motorcycles because they are looking for vehicles. The new oscillating headlights help motorcycles be seen.

Boats – Rules of the Waterways

Safety is just as important when your vehicle of choice is a boat and your paths are made of water. Unfortunately, Illinois waterways are the scene of numerous accidents each spring and summer. In 2008 alone, there were more than 120 accidents with damages totaling \$2,000 or more, and 13 of those resulted in fatalities.

Many boating accidents are simply the result of operating the watercraft in a reckless manner. It is critical for the operators of boats and other watercraft to understand and obey the water traffic rules. Here are some of the most important ones to remember:

- To operate watercrafts, people under the age of 18 must complete a boating safety course for a minimum of eight hours.
- All boats must have personal floatation device (PDF) that has been approved by the United States Coast Guard. These must be in good condition, easily accessible and the appropriate size for each of the passengers aboard. Families, if the boat is smaller than 26 feet in length, any passenger younger than 13 must wear a PDF while on board at all times.
- All boats must have a whistle or horn that can be heard for a half mile.

And of course, whatever your mode of transportation, alcohol, and driving of any kind are never a wise combination. To keep your family and those around you safe this season, familiarize yourself with the law and the rules of the road and water. And above all, remember that we share our roads and waterways with thousands of others each day. ▽

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