

A Brief History of Motorcyclist Safety Efforts: 1970–2009

This summary is adopted from a document provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation to participants in the November 2013 Motorcycle Safety Program Management course.

1970–1979

The emphasis was twofold: developing education programs to teach individuals to operate a motorcycle and requiring the use of motorcycle helmets. Motorcycling was becoming popular because inexpensive small-engine motorcycles were more available, it was accepted as a “fun” recreational activity, and interest was being generated by movies such as *Easy Rider*. Throughout the 1970s motorcycle sales and registrations increased, new models were introduced, and more crashes and fatalities occurred. Although a lot of work was done on encouraging rider education, very few organizations or states offered or funded such courses.

1973 - The Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC) created the Safety and Education Foundation, which was funded by the five motorcycle manufacturers selling motorcycles in the United States: Harley-Davidson, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, and Yamaha. The Safety and Education Foundation was separated from the MIC and became the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF). The goal of the MSF was to develop rider-education curriculums and materials that promoted safe motorcycle operation.

1974 - The MSF published the initial Beginning Rider Course and started distributing it to state departments of education across the country. This curriculum was based on existing rider- education materials and was very elementary.

The National Public Safety Research Institute (NPSRI) published the “Motorcycle Task Analysis,” which identified over 3,000 tasks a motorcycle operator needed to learn and practice to operate a motorcycle. This document supported future curriculum development.

1975 - 47 states and the District of Columbia had universal helmet-use laws. California and Illinois did not pass universal helmet laws, and the motorcycle-rights organizations lobbied Congress to repeal the requirement for such a law. This resulted in 28 states repealing their universal helmet law.

The MSF, using the “Motorcycle Task Analysis,” developed and published the Motorcycle Curriculum Specifications, which outlined what topics and skills should be taught in an entry-level rider-education course. The intent was to allow states to develop or approve their own curriculums.

1976 - The MSF, in cooperation with NPSRI, completed and published the “Photographic Task Analysis,” which concentrated on turning, braking, collision avoidance, and surmounting obstacle skills.

Based on the research completed, the MSF introduced the 20-hour Motorcycle Rider Course (MRC). The MRC included three hours of classroom instruction on identifying and managing hazards; three hours of on-road experience; and an end-of-course knowledge,

skill, and on-road evaluation. The MSF provided grants to states and private organizations to implement rider- education courses. These grants provided an instructor certification course, educational materials, and startup funding.

1978 - The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in cooperation with the MSF, conducted the Rider Training Feasibility Study to determine whether educational programs could teach individuals to ride a motorcycle and whether such programs were administratively feasible. The Feasibility Study verified that individuals could learn to ride a motorcycle through a course and determined that there were administrative concerns that sometimes prevented organizations from offering rider education.

1979 - The MSF revised the Motorcycle Rider Course based on information learned from the Feasibility Study. The revised curriculum eliminated the on-road experiences, reduced the number of hours for hazard identification and risk management, and reduced some of the original administrative requirements.

Rhode Island became the first state to legislate rider education and to fund the effort.

1980–1989

Rider education was still the main focus for motorcycle safety. The perceived threat of universal helmet laws inspired the creation of more motorcycle-rights organizations. These organizations promoted rider education instead of helmet laws. They were very successful in convincing state legislators to introduce and pass state motorcycle-safety programs. Most of these state programs had dedicated funding and a state agency to administer the rider-education effort. During this decade, 31 states passed legislation and implemented a rider-education program. Motorcycle registration, crashes, and the number of individuals completing training increased for the first five or six years of this decade. As the economy struggled, motorcycle sales, registrations, the number of individuals trained, and motorcycle crashes started to drop. The motorcycle-rights groups and the MSF were the driving forces for motorcycle-safety efforts in the 1980s.

1981 - The NHTSA-funded Accident Cause Factors and Identification of Countermeasures (Hurt report) was released. Although the report provided a lot of valuable information, what got the most attention was “In multiple vehicle accidents, the driver of the other vehicle violated the motorcycle right of way and caused the accident in two-thirds of those accidents.” This inspired the motorcycle-rights organizations to successfully lobby for more motorist- and public-awareness efforts. Unfortunately, that finding continues to influence many motorcycle-safety efforts and has focused the blame for most motorcycle crashes onto the motorists. Many motorcyclists still do not understand their contribution to a crash.

1984 - The state motorcycle safety coordinators and MSF met in Dillon, Colorado, to create the State Motorcycle Safety Coordinators’ Council. The Council was funded by the MSF and was created to open the lines of communication between the state program coordinators and the MSF. The Council eventually separated from the MSF and became the National Association of State Motorcycle Safety Administrators (SMSA).

1986 - The MSF developed and introduced the Motorcycle Rider Course–Riding and Street Skills (MRC-RSS). This curriculum addressed the skills that the Hurt report stated were seriously lacking in crash-involved motorcyclists. Braking, cornering, and crash avoidance were emphasized in this curriculum.

1990–1999

The MSF and the motorcycle-rights organizations continued to provide the main impetus to motorcycle-safety efforts during this decade, and rider education and motorist awareness continued to be the main focus. The motorist-awareness campaign MAY (Motorcycles and You) was adopted by most states, and the month of May became the time when states concentrated on promoting the message to motorists to look for motorcycles. Fourteen more states passed legislation creating state rider-education and motorist-awareness programs.

States started offering license-waiver programs for individuals completing an approved rider-education course. All or a portion of the state’s motorcycle licensing procedures were waived. Rider education became part of the state’s motorcycle licensing process. These licensing-waiver programs are the single most effective method to have individuals enroll and complete rider education. Course participants believe the licensing waiver is the “easiest” method to obtain a motorcycle license. Enrollment and training completion numbers significantly increased. At the same time, motorcycle crashes and fatalities started to decline, so rider education was heralded as an effective motorcycle-crash countermeasure.

The economy was on an upward swing, motorcycle sales started to increase, and more individuals of all ages and professions started motorcycling. Sports motorcycles became popular. Towards the end of the decade, crashes and fatalities started to increase.

1991 - Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) authorized NHTSA to encourage mandatory universal helmet laws through sanctions or grants. States started proposing helmet laws to avoid sanctions, and some states considered eliminating dedicated funds for rider education. (In 1995, Congress repealed the universal helmet law requirement.)

1993 - NHTSA, in cooperation with the SMSA, developed procedures for doing Technical Assessments of Motorcycle Safety Programs. Four states completed the Technical Assessments. The purpose of these assessments was to determine the current status, strengths, and possible weaknesses in their motorcycle-safety effort based on six standards.

1997 - NHTSA published the “Uniform Guidelines for State Highway Safety Programs Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 3: Motorcycle Safety.” NHTSA assumed responsibility for promoting and organizing the completion of Technical Assessments.

2000–2010

Motorcycle sales, registrations and crashes continued to increase. The increased number of crashes caused many organizations and agencies to look at the benefits of state motorcycle-safety efforts. More and more individuals continued to complete rider-education courses, but crashes, fatalities, and injuries continued to climb through 2009.

2000 - The National Agenda for Motorcycle Safety (NAMS) was released. The Agenda was developed by a group of experts from various disciplines that analyzed motorcycle data and formulated objectives for reducing motorcycle crashes. Although rider education was still identified as an important component, other areas like law enforcement, licensing, highway engineering, and data collection were also identified. Motorcycle safety was considered a complex effort that needed a more comprehensive approach. Unfortunately, most states still relied on rider-education and motorist-awareness efforts

2001 - The MSF introduced the new Basic Rider Course (BRC). This 15 hour course of instruction was based on customer feedback and extensive field testing. Participants were able to achieve more success and failure rates declined.

2006 - Congress passed the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act—A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). This act created Section 2010 funds for motorcycle-safety education and public awareness. States could apply for grants to support their rider-education and public-awareness efforts. Most states received at least \$100,000 per year for their efforts. NHTSA published the revised “Uniform Guideline for Motorcycle Safety” for use in the Technical Assessments. The original six components were expanded to eleven components. Oregon introduced a new rider-education curriculum based on research and crash data. Only Oregon and Idaho adopt this curriculum.

2008 - The Federal Highway Administration created the Motorcycle Advisory Committee to look at how highway engineering may impact motorcycles. NHTSA convened an expert panel to define safe motorcycle behavior. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) and NHTSA published the “Guidelines for Motorcycle Licensing.”

2009 - NHTSA convened a group of experts to develop the National Standards for Entry Level Rider Training.