

Q&A: CDC, U.S. Congressman Tim Walberg, and the AMA

What's the short version of this issue?

According to the AMA, a CDC task force is preparing to recommend that all states have all-rider motorcycle helmet laws. U.S. Congressman Tim Walberg wrote to the CDC director questioning the CDC's goal and their involvement in what he termed "transportation safety." The AMA jumped on the bandwagon, using Representative Walberg's letter as an opportunity to repeat its mantras and sound bites.

Why is SMARTER concerned about this?

The AMA's position on motorcycling issues does not represent the view of all motorcyclists, and SMARTER believes motorcyclists deserve to know all aspects of an issue, not just a one-sided view.

How has SMARTER responded?

SMARTER wrote a letter to the CDC director (<http://www.smarter-usa.org/documents/letter-CDC-2013.12.04.pdf>), issued a news release (<http://www.smarter-usa.org/documents/NR-2013.12.12.pdf>), and prepared this Q&A document to provide the motorcycling community with complete information.

Why does SMARTER label Representative Walberg's question as "ludicrous"?

The main question posed by Representative Walberg and repeated in the AMA material is: "Is it the goal or strategy of the CDC to reduce the use of motorcycles...?" It is obvious the CDC is concerned about and has a responsibility related to injury prevention as well as to disease prevention and control. The goal of the Task Force as stated in the *Federal Register* is "to identify community preventive programs, services, and policies that increase healthy longevity, save lives and dollars and improve Americans' quality of life." The AMA calls the goal "a direct attack on the lifestyle of millions of motorcycle riders in the U.S." These statements and questions by Representative Walberg and the AMA are ludicrous because they are absurd and illogical. Representative Walberg's question is simply not honest or sincere. He and the AMA know the CDC is not out to reduce the use of motorcycles. The CDC's mission is about "Saving Lives, Protecting People."

How does SMARTER and the AMA differ on the issue of helmet use and helmet-use laws?

SMARTER encourages all riders to wear "all the gear" every time they ride, including the use of a quality DOT-certified helmet. The AMA states that it encourages the voluntary use of motorcycle helmets. SMARTER is an association of motorcyclists who support all-rider motorcycle-helmet laws as a critical component of comprehensive motorcyclist-safety programs. The AMA does not recognize the research that shows the effectiveness of all-rider helmet laws and is opposed to such laws.

Why does SMARTER support all-rider motorcycle helmet laws?

SMARTER is an association that, to the fullest extent possible, bases its positions and recommendations regarding motorcyclist safety on available research. In this case, the research is clear, overwhelming, and undeniable: Wearing a helmet is an effective method to prevent death

and prevent or reduce head injury in the event of a crash; and when an all-rider helmet law is in effect, more riders wear helmets.

What does the AMA say about all-rider helmet laws?

The AMA has a meaningless catchphrase they repeat regarding helmet laws: Helmet laws do nothing to prevent crashes. This is the AMA's worn-out mantra that is designed to promote its position against comprehensive safety measures. It is obvious that helmets are not designed to prevent crashes; they are designed to prevent death and injury in the EVENT of a crash.

Are there components of motorcyclist-safety efforts that SMARTER and the AMA both support?

Absolutely! The AMA supports actions it says help riders avoid crashes from occurring, and points to voluntary rider education, improved licensing and testing, and expanded motorist-awareness programs as examples. SMARTER also supports these types of activities as components of a comprehensive motorcyclist-safety strategy; however, SMARTER recognizes there is little or no research to support that these actions actually work. The AMA makes statements that lead riders to believe that, for example, rider education and motorist awareness are scientifically proven effective crash-prevention methods. In fact, the evidence is unclear whether or not rider training reduces crashes, and there are no evaluations of the effectiveness of campaigns to increase driver awareness on motorcyclist crash risk. To state, as the AMA does, that these are two effective measures to reduce motorcyclist crashes is just not supported by research. There is, however, extensive high quality research to support the use of helmets and all-rider helmet laws. To ignore this research, as the AMA does, and to advocate for the exclusion of the only scientifically proven method of preventing motorcyclist deaths and injuries in the event of a crash is simply irresponsible.

Where can I find summary information about strategies to improve motorcyclist safety, especially about helmets, helmet laws, and rider education?

SMARTER has a wealth of research posted on our website at www.smarter-usa.org. A good place to start is with "Countermeasures That Work: A Highway Safety Countermeasure Guide for State Highway Safety Offices, Seventh Edition," published in 2013. This guide is a basic reference to assist those interested in selecting effective, evidence-based measures for traffic-safety problem areas.

Chapter 5, pages 5-1 through 5-31 (pp. 217–247), addresses the various components of motorcyclist-safety programs. This document is easy to read and understand and is extremely well referenced. A PDF can be accessed at <http://www.smarter-usa.org/documents/NHTSA-traffic-safety-countermeasures-2013.pdf>. Scroll to chapter 5 or navigate (Shift+Ctrl+N) to document page 217.