

SKILLED MOTORCYCLIST ASSOCIATION—RESPONSIBLE, TRAINED AND EDUCATED RIDERS, INC.
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Motorcyclist Organizations Differ Over Recent Government Agency Announcements

Scottville, MI – In Nov. 2012 the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) released its 2013 Most Wanted List, and motorcyclist safety was not on it. That same month, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report listing its recommendations to support states' motorcyclist-safety efforts. The Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF), a motorcyclist-rights organization opposing mandatory helmet laws, lauded the NTSB's decision to remove motorcyclist safety from its most-wanted list, saying the NTSB recognized that "proper education and awareness programs work" (http://www.mrf.org/2012/news_release/12NR31.htm). MRF then criticized the GAO for recommending increased flexibility in the use of Section 2010 motorcycle safety grant program funds (http://www.mrf.org/2012/news_release/12NR32.htm).

The Skilled Motorcyclist Association—Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc. (SMARTER), a rider-responsibility group supporting mandatory helmet laws, disagreed with MRF's interpretation why motorcyclist safety was not included on the 2013 Most Wanted List and confirmed with an NTSB representative that the agency remains steadfast in its original position recommending mandatory all-rider helmet laws nationwide (<http://www.smarter-usa.org/documents/PR-02.05.13-NTSB.pdf>). In reaction to the GAO-issued report, SMARTER urged immediate implementation of GAO's recommendations to identify research priorities and to give states spending flexibility to expand the strategies for which the Section 2010 monies can be used (<http://www.smarter-usa.org/documents/PR-02.05.13-GAO.pdf>).

Both MRF and SMARTER support motorcycling safety education. MRF claims to have educated the NTSB "on a comprehensive approach to motorcyclist safety" and says it was "instrumental in getting the grant program up and running" so that the money "can only be used for educational purposes." So why the differing reactions to the agency announcements? Why does MRF deem education about helmet use and other critical components of a comprehensive motorcyclist-safety program an inappropriate use of the federal-grant funds? Why shouldn't the broadest possible spectrum of safety strategies be implemented for crash avoidance and to keep motorcyclists safer in the event of a crash?

The fact is the founding purpose of each organization informs their respective viewpoints. MRF's primary mission is championing motorcyclists' rights activism on a national level, whereas SMARTER's mission is providing motorcyclists research-based facts about the effectiveness of motorcycle helmets and gear so they can take responsibility for their own safety. MRF is fiercely opposed to mandatory helmet or apparel laws, citing infringement of personal freedom, yet welcomes government involvement when public funding is spent in areas it endorses. It appears MRF is concerned that governmental expenditures on components other

than rider training and motorist awareness will erode their rights agenda, rights they do not want to temper with responsibility.

Both groups of course enjoy the freedom to express their divergent opinions. Motorcyclists should carefully consider the source of the information they receive and whether a goal other than motorcyclist safety is cause for bias. Furthering a legislative agenda by disseminating incorrect or misleading information—or by blocking information altogether—is a disservice to motorcyclists. If we are to “let the rider decide,” the rider deserves complete and correct information in order to make informed, intelligent decisions.

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The Skilled Motorcyclist Association—Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc. (SMARTER) is dedicated to enhancing motorcyclist safety by educating riders and the public for the advancement of responsible riding.