

Looking Twice is not Enough

Introduction

“Watch for Motorcycles, Look Twice, Save a Life.” This is the traditional reminder we provide to car drivers during the month of May. “Look twice, save a life” is an easy to remember rhyming phrase which tells us the end goal: save a life. However, to make that a reality car drivers need to know more and do more. First drivers need to remember they are not just looking for machines (motorcycles), they are searching for the people riding the machine. They are searching for a motorcyclist or a motorcycle rider. Watch for motorcyclists. They be hard to see. And motorcyclists need to do their part by making themselves and their machines conspicuous.

The crash scenario we are trying to prevent is when the auto driver violates the right-of-way of the motorcyclist and after claims not to have seen the motorcyclist or not have seen the motorcyclist until it was too late. There are lots of reasons motorcyclists can be hard to see. Our association (smarter-usa.org) has identified at least 13 causes for this type of crash indicated in the research. Sadly, just looking twice may not help much.

Drivers need to take more time looking by moving their head and shoulders back and forth and side to side while searching. Look toward specific distances and look specifically for vulnerable road users.

Pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists are all vulnerable road users. To look specifically means to ask and answer questions about what is perceived. Is there a pedestrian near, a bicyclist approaching on the roadway or in a designated bicycle lane? Motorcyclists in the distance are especially hard to see. Look near, intermediate and far.

Here is what to do

While looking and questioning, rock your upper body forward and back as you are looking left and right. Rock side to side if you are looking ahead like when waiting to turn left. The rocking motion helps to see around the auto pillars and road side obstacles. Rocking also changes the angle of your sight line. This addresses the research that shows that a motorcyclist heading straight towards you is difficult for your eyes/brain to pick out. Rocking and specifically asking and answering questions focus your attention and also slows down the look process, both of which the research indicates will help you identify vulnerable road users.

If a motorcyclist is identified assume she/he is traveling faster than it seems and will arrive sooner than you think. Finally when you determine all is clear, roll forward in a slow and cautious manner. Don't conclude there is no risk and simply “gas it.” Assume you could have missed something. Moving forward in a cautious manner creates more time and space for both you and the possible approaching vulnerable road user.

Summary

Looking twice is a great reminder. How we look, where we look and being focused on identifying vulnerable road users are the components of looking twice that will make the difference between seeing when necessary or later saying “Sorry, I didn't see him.”

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