

Model National Standards for Entry-Level Motorcycle Rider Training Purpose and Background

SMARTER editor note: This background information has been slightly edited from a response to questions submitted to NHTSA by SMARTER. The response was provided on January 13, 2020 via email from Kristin Rosenthal, M.Ed., MCHES, Highway Safety Specialist, U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. An example of editing is SMARTER's substitution of "we" with NHTSA.

The "standards" can be accessed here:

http://smarter-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2_2014_NHTSA_model_national_a.pdf

In 2011, NHTSA funded a meeting of a broad spectrum of motorcycle rider training professionals to develop the Model National Standards for Entry-Level Motorcycle Rider Training. These standards establish baseline content that all entry-level riders should be taught in motorcycle rider training classes held in the United States. The members of the development team who developed these NON-BINDING guidelines are listed on page 2 of the document.

These "standards" are not what one would typically interpret as standards. NHTSA does not regulate motorcycle rider training curricula. Each state is free to use whatever training program that they see fit. These standards represent a consensus-based process by independent subject matter experts, NOT BY NHTSA. NHTSA doesn't own these standards; NHTSA just funded the process and paid the travel costs for the subject matter experts to gather in DC to participate in the process.

NHTSA's impetus for funding the establishment of these minimum guidelines was to ensure that any NEW curriculum providers had a basic level of quality, AS DETERMINED BY THESE EXPERTS. There is no science behind these guidelines, which separates them from NHTSA's Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (which are science-based and enforceable). The expertise of the development panel members should be recognized, however the distinction between expert opinion guidelines and science-based standards should be noted.

An additional reason why NHTSA funded the development of the Model Standards was the recognition that some states were eager to develop state-specific curricula that addressed their state-specific motorcycle-related crash and injury profiles. Providing those states with the tools to help them develop their own curriculum is in NHTSA's best interest given both NHTSA capabilities and limited authority.

In 2016, NHTSA funded a project to have an independent third-party research firm compare all known existing entry-level rider training curricula to access the curricula in terms of meeting the Model National Standards. After reviewing the research report internally, NHTSA made the decision to notify all of the providers and offer them a chance to confirm the findings, contest any factual errors, and allow them time to either make any adjustments or develop a public response to the report prior to it being published. NHTSA is currently still within the planned window of time to allow the providers to offer feedback. As of January 13, 2020 NHTSA has not published the report, however each provider has been emailed the analysis of their own curriculum for their review. Out of respect to the curriculum providers, NHTSA is withholding the results until the findings are published which is planned for some time in 2020.

It must be noted the findings of the assessment of the various curricula compared to the Model National Standards, have no bearing on what type of course a state can choose to utilize as the findings are non-binding. The findings also have no impact on a state's ability to meet the criteria for NHTSA 405(f) Motorcycle Safety funding.