

# INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

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## DEATHS OF OLDER MOTORCYCLISTS INCREASING; RIDERS 40+ ACCOUNT FOR A BIGGER SHARE OF THE CYCLIST DEATH TOLL

### *Problem of cyclist deaths isn't helped by weaker helmet use laws*

ARLINGTON, VA — Deaths among motorcyclists age 40 and older, which steadily increased during most of the 1990s, jumped dramatically from 1997 to 2000, the latest year for which statistics are available. The increase during the last three years exceeds 65 percent, and the overall increase in deaths among older motorcyclists since 1990 exceeds 150 percent.

Until 1997, the increases in deaths among older motorcyclists were more than offset by declining deaths among younger riders. But since then deaths among younger motorcyclists have been increasing. The 40-and-older group of riders accounted for about 40 percent of all fatally injured riders in 2000, up from 14 percent in 1990. The median age of bikers killed is 36 years old, up from 27 in 1990. These are the findings of new analyses conducted by researchers at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

	Age: <30	30-39	40+	Total
1990	1,885	805	438	3,128
1991	1,580	711	410	2,701
1992	1,242	638	411	2,291
1993	1,229	647	469	2,345
1994	1,121	584	509	2,214
1995	1,057	562	519	2,138
1996	932	541	604	2,077
1997	837	547	672	2,056
1998	897	599	730	2,226
1999	878	601	940	2,419
2000	975	687	1,127	2,789

“Over the last three years, the number of motorcyclist deaths has gone up 68 percent in the 40-and-older group compared with 20 percent among people younger than 40,” says Susan Ferguson, the Institute’s senior vice president for research. She adds that

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this shift isn't because of the aging of the population. It reflects the changing demographics of motorcycle riders. Surveys show cycle owners aren't as young anymore. Increasingly they're older, affluent professionals. According to the Motorcycle Industry Council, the typical U.S. bike owner now is about 38 years old compared with 24 years old in 1980.

The repeal of helmet use laws in some states and the weakening of the laws in other states are contributing to the increases in motorcyclist deaths. For example, in 1997 Texas stopped requiring helmet use by riders 21 and older who have health insurance (at least \$10,000 in medical benefits for injuries) or motorcycle training. The result was to reduce the helmet wearing rate from 97 percent before the law was weakened to 66 percent in the year after the law was changed. From 1996 (before the helmet law change) to 1998 (the first full year after the law change), deaths went up by about one-third. In 1996, the death rate per 100,000 motorcycle registrations was 74. It increased to 99 in 1998 and has continued to increase, rising to 120 per 100,000 in 2000. In comparison, during the same years the death rate increased much less — from 46 to 56 per 100,000 — in California and Ohio, where helmet laws covering all motorcyclists were retained.

Only 20 states and the District of Columbia have mandatory helmet use laws covering all riders. Colorado, Illinois, and Iowa have no helmet laws at all, and the other 27 states have limited laws applying to some riders, usually those younger than 18.

For riders of all ages, the relative risks associated with motorcycle riding are extremely high. The death rate on motorcycles per registered vehicle is about 4 times the rate in passenger vehicles, even though the average motorcycle travels many fewer miles. Per mile traveled, the death rate on motorcycles is 18 times higher than in passenger vehicles.

End 2-page release on trends in motorcyclist deaths  
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