

# Priority Level Three: Motorcyclists

In recent years, motorcycle rider fatalities have risen steadily in Washington State, mirroring a national trend. Rider deaths in Washington State totaled 73 in 2005 and rose to 78 in 2008, one of the worst years in the state since reinstatement of the comprehensive helmet law in 1990. This upward trend is in clear opposition to the overall decline in all other traffic fatalities occurring both in Washington and nationally.

In 2006, Governor Gregoire asked the Governor’s Task Force on Motorcycle Safety, including the Washington State Patrol, Washington Traffic Safety Commission, and the Department of Licensing, to study the rise in motorcycle fatalities, and set a goal of reducing those fatalities by ten riders per year.

Data from the Department of Licensing shows that motorcycle registrations increased 132% between 1999 and 2008. During the same period, motorcycle fatalities increased over 100%. The data shows that the number of registered riders is moderately outpacing the number of motorcycle fatalities.

Between 2006 and 2008, a total of 225 motorcyclists (217 operators and 8 passengers) lost their lives on Washington roads. Of these motorcyclist fatalities, 58.3% involved impairment on the part of the motorcycle operator or the

## Washington State Motorcycle Fatalities vs. Registrations, 1999 and 2008<sup>1</sup>

	1999 <sup>1</sup>	2008 <sup>1</sup>	% increase
Motorcycle Registrations	97,990	227,371	132%
Motorcycle Fatalities	38	78	105%

Source: FARS and Department of Licensing

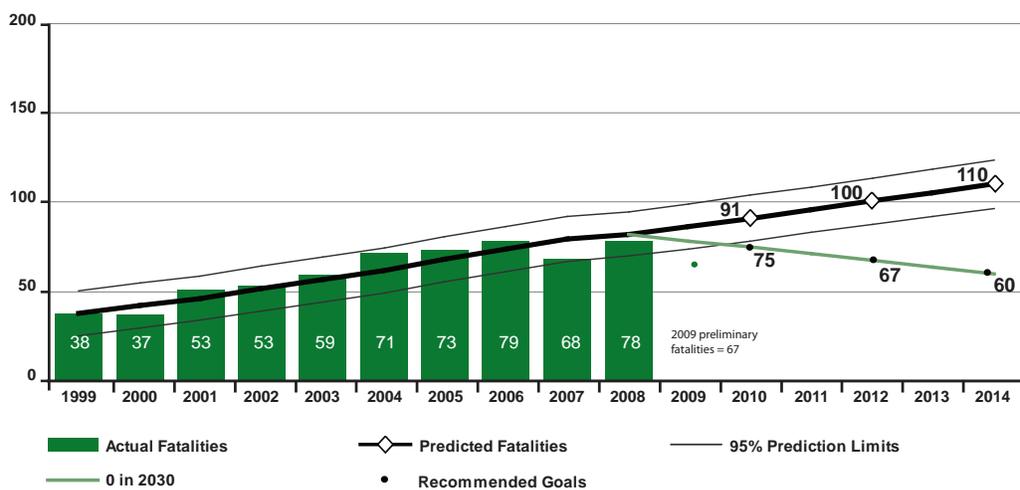
<sup>1</sup>Years are calendar years, January through December.

**In recent years, motorcycle rider fatalities have risen steadily in Washington State, mirroring a national trend.**

driver of the other vehicle. The second most common factor contributing to motorcyclist fatalities is speeding (51.1%). Almost one-third (29.8%) of fatalities involved both impairment and speeding.

Between 2006 and 2008, 116 of the 231 (50.2%) motorcycle operators involved in fatal crashes were impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs. Of these 116 impaired motorcycle operators, 46.6% were impaired by drugs only, 31.9% were impaired by alcohol only, and 21.6% impaired by both alcohol and other drugs. Cannabinoids are the most common class of drugs paired with alcohol among motorcycle operators involved in fatal crashes. Motorcycle fatalities involve collisions with other vehicles a little over half the time (55.8%). In motorcycle-vehicle

## Motorcyclist Fatalities: Trends, Forecasts, and Goals



Note: In this definition, "Motorcycle" includes Body Types 80, 82, 83

Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System

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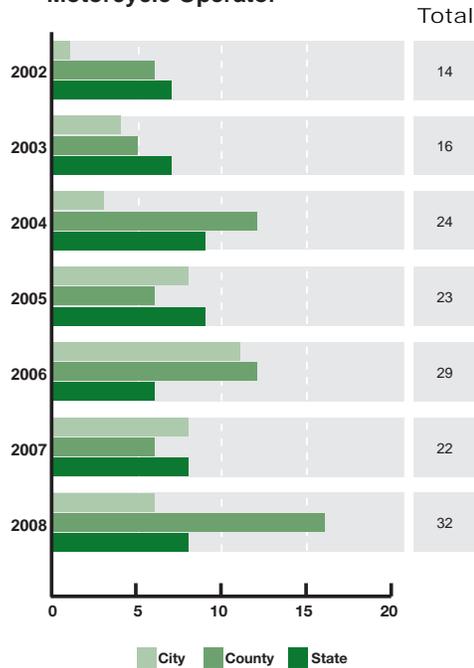
fatal crashes from 2003-2007, the most common vehicle driver errors reported are distraction or failure to yield. About half (52.9%) of vehicle drivers involved in motorcycle-vehicle fatal crashes were found to have committed driver errors that led to the collision; 72.1% of the motorcycle operators involved were found to have committed errors leading to the collision (in many cases, both parties committed errors).

Between 2006 and 2008, most motorcyclist fatalities occurred on state highways (45.3%), while 30.2% occurred on county roads and 23.5% on city streets. The remainder (about 1%) occurred on other types of roads, such as Forest Service roads.

Spring and summer months are the main months for motorcycle fatalities, when motorcyclists are likely riding more often due to favorable weather and longer daylight hours; 78.9% of motorcycle fatalities occur between April and September every year. Over 90% of all motorcyclists killed are male.

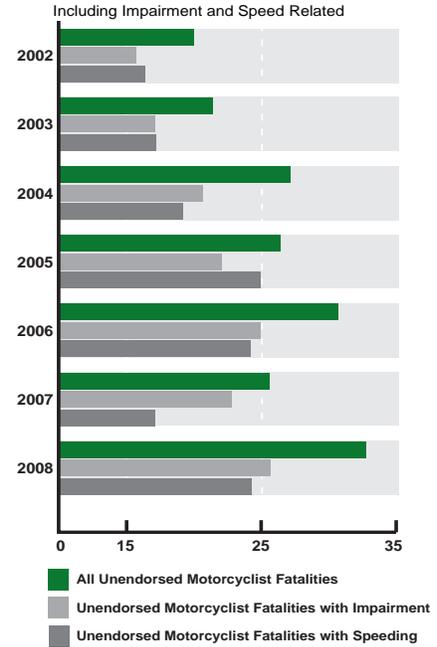
Age does play a role in motorcycle crashes. In fact, younger motorcycle operators aged 35 and under are involved in 46% of fatal motorcycle collisions, but hold only 20% of motorcycle registrations in the state. However, this does not take into account a potential difference in the number of miles each age group rides, since no data currently exists in our state on motorcycle VMT by age. If younger motorcycle operators travel more miles, they have a higher likelihood of involvement in a collision.

**Fatalities Involving an Unendorsed Motorcycle Operator**



Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System

**Unendorsed Motorcyclist Operator Involved Fatalities Including Impairment and Speed Related**



Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System (FARS)

## Background on Motorcycle Fatality Rates

Vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) for motorcycles is not currently available in the State of Washington, so it is not possible to create a fatalities per motorcycle VMT rate. Therefore the baseline for the motorcycle riding population is the number of registered motorcycles. This data is reliable, readily available from the Department of Licensing, and accurately depicts the popularity of motorcycle riding within the state. In addition, this measure segregates motorcycles by type (2-wheel, 3-wheel, etc), and excludes non-licensable motorcycles (such as dirt bikes).

Washington intends to have motorcycle VMT data in future updates of *Target Zero*.

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### Laws affecting motorcycle riders

Under Washington law, individuals need a special endorsement on their driver licenses to operate a motorcycle. This endorsement can be obtained either by passing the motorcycle endorsement examination or by satisfactorily completing a motorcycle operator training course. To encourage motorcycle operator training, Washington State passed a law in 2007 that allows law enforcement officers to impound the motorcycles of those riders who do not have a motorcycle endorsement. Between 2006 and 2008, 35% of motorcycle operators involved in fatal crashes were unendorsed.

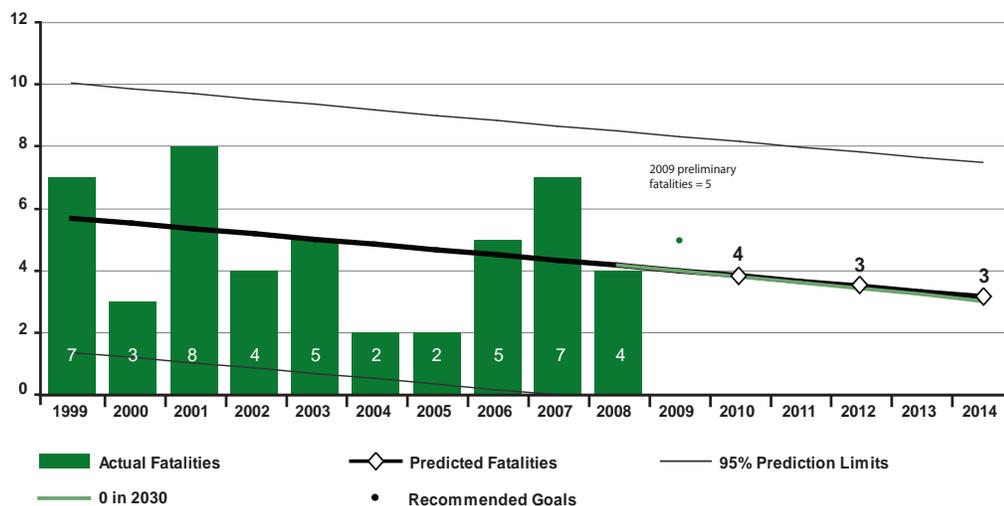
Another recent change that affects motorcyclists is the helmet law passed in 2009. That law requires all motorcyclists to wear helmets that meet federal standards (FMVSS 218). Those standards include thick foam padding, a secure chin strap, a manufacturer's label on the inside of the helmet, and a permanent, legible USDOT sticker on the outside rear of the helmet. Unhelmeted riders comprise a small percentage of motorcyclist fatalities every year.

### The Motorcycle Task Force

The Governor's Task Force on Motorcycle Safety was formed in 2006. The Task Force consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders including the Traffic Safety Commission, the State Patrol, the Department of Licensing, motorcyclist rights groups, and industry representatives. The Task Force's goal was to identify and analyze the factors related to motorcycle collisions, and to provide recommendations for countermeasures likely to reduce fatalities and serious injuries.

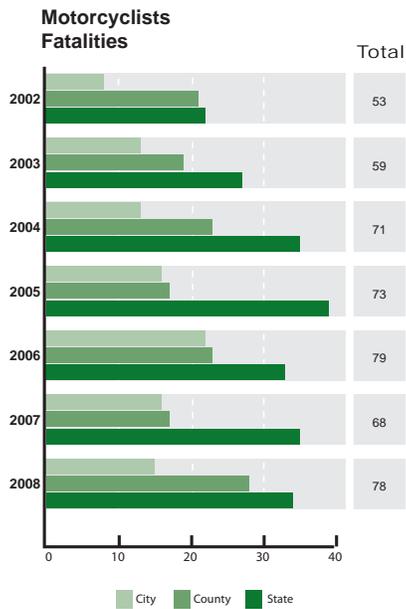
The Task Force studied ten years of motorcycle crash data and concluded that while there are multiple contributions to motorcycle crashes that result in fatalities or serious injuries, it appears that the most important factors are within the control of the rider. Efforts to reduce fatalities and serious injuries should focus on rider skill and behavior. The Task Force published its recommendations to reduce fatalities and serious injuries by improving rider behavior and skills through three areas: training, public awareness, and accountability. A full copy of the report is available at [www.dol.wa.gov/about/reports/mototaskforce.pdf](http://www.dol.wa.gov/about/reports/mototaskforce.pdf).

### Unhelmeted Motorcyclist Fatalities: Trends, Forecasts, and Goals

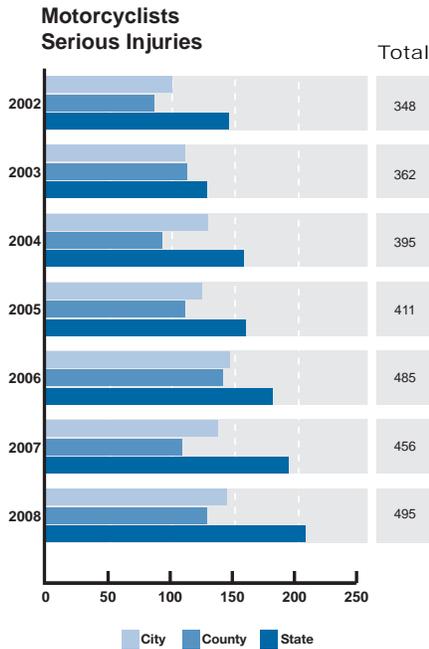


Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System

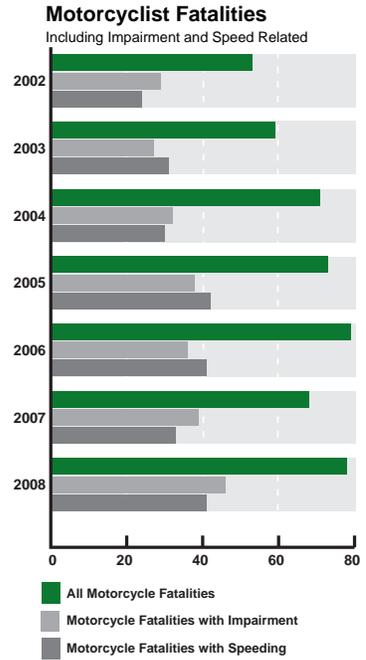
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Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System

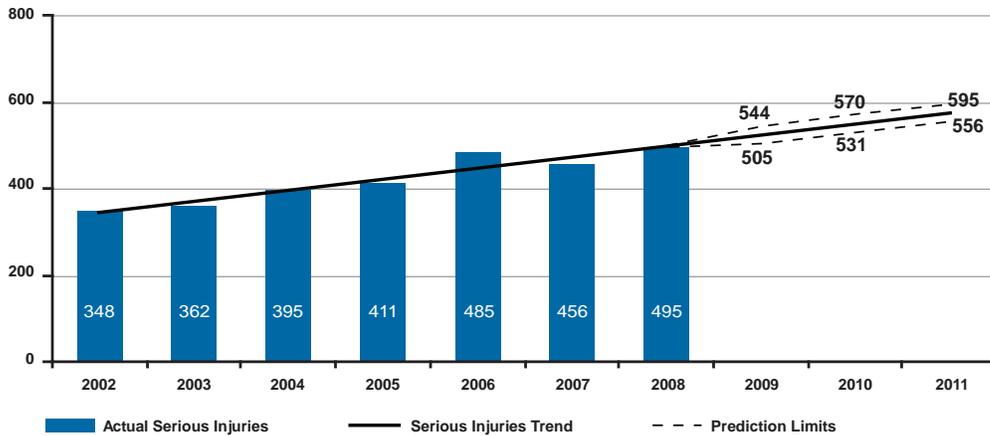


Note: In this definition, "Motorcycle" includes Body Types 80, 82, 83  
Source: WSDOT Collision Database



Source: Washington Traffic Safety Commission - Fatality Analysis Recording System (FARS)

## Motorcyclist Serious Injuries: Trends and Forecasts



Note: In this definition, "Motorcycle" includes Body Types 80, 82, 83

Source: WSDOT Collision Database

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### 3.2 Strategies to Reduce Collisions Involving Motorcycles

<b>3.2.A Reduce numbers of untrained riders</b>	3.2.A1 Management review of class distribution. (T)
	3.2.A2 Increase number of classes. (E)
	3.2.A3 Provide tuition incentives for completion of training. (E)
<b>3.2.B Reduce numbers of impaired, unskilled, and unsafe riders</b>	3.2.B1 WTSC public safety campaign/partnership. (T)
	3.2.B2 Use motorcycle helmet violation trend data to inform enforcement efforts.
	3.2.B3 Promote self-policing within the motorcycle community – operators help other operators make good decisions.
<b>3.2.C Reduce numbers of non-endorsed riders</b>	3.2.C1 Clarify impoundment policy. (T)
	3.2.C2 Dealership cooperation. (E)
	3.2.C3 WTSC public safety campaign/partnership. (T)
	3.2.C4 Continue to increase field training. (T)
<b>3.2.D Increase driver awareness and increase rider safety awareness</b>	3.2.D1 Use owner’s bike in training courses. (E)
<b>3.2.E Improve enforcement</b>	3.2.E1 Support specialized law enforcement training in motorcycle DUI detection and motorcycle crash investigation.
	3.2.E2 Increase use of WSP aviation for enforcement.
<b>3.2.F Continue convening DOL’s Motorcycle Advisory Committee</b>	

P=Proven, T=Tried, E=Experimental