

## POSITION

# Voluntary Helmet Use

The Alliance of Bikers Aimed Toward Education (ABATE) of Pennsylvania encourages the voluntary use of helmets by adult motorcyclists as part of a comprehensive motorcycle safety program.

ABATE of Pennsylvania believes that accident prevention and avoidance are more important to significantly reducing injuries and fatalities than any mandatory equipment laws.

To better understand the organization's position on helmet laws, it is first necessary to make a distinction between the use of helmets and mandatory helmet laws. Some members of society tend to view the helmet only as a mechanical safety device in the same category as seat belts. What they fail to realize is that it is viewed by motorcyclists as an accessory of personal apparel connected with their chosen lifestyle and their right as adults to make their own decisions. Unlike seatbelts, helmets do not come "standard" with motorcycles and represent a separate purchase. Helmet laws, on the other hand, are a manifestation of society's belief that its members lack the wisdom to make decisions about personal safety and must therefore be subject to arbitrary laws. This is a concept we must reject.

The answer to motorcycle safety is training and awareness, not mandated Helmet laws. In 2002, ABATE of PA supported legislation to increase funding for the Pennsylvania Motorcycle Safety Program. Governor Schweiker signed that legislation into law. The surcharge on motorcycle licenses and permits were increased from \$2 to \$5 per year. This increased funding has allowed the MSP to open 10 new sites around the state with more on the way in the near future. Presently, there are 69 training sites operating. According to the MSP, 27,500 students were trained in 2006.

Contrary to whatever emotional hearsay some opposing organizations publish, there is a motorcycle helmet law in Pennsylvania. Helmets are still required for ALL motorcycle riders under 21, and for those with less than two years riding experience, unless they have successfully completed the free state-approved rider safety course.

While the law does allow freedom of choice in the use of helmets, it also contains safeguards for those not yet trained or skilled enough to make an informed decision on helmet safety. Enactment of the Freedom Of Choice bill on helmets represents what our founding fathers intended when they wrote the constitution... that government works best with the consent of the governed.

Laws mandating helmet use at all times have no significant effect on the safety of motorcycling in general, although they may or may not be beneficial in individual accident circumstances. The decision on when to wear a helmet while operating a motorcycle should remain with each responsible adult rider.

Rather than focus on mandatory helmet use, which has been shown repeatedly not to affect population statistics on motorcycle fatalities, appropriate attention should be directed toward reducing riding under the influence and toward increasing the effective motorcycle operator education and licensing programs in the state.

**For us, this is an issue of personal freedom.** Mandatory helmet laws are annoying and unnecessary to an extremely small minority of citizens who would prefer to make their own decisions on an issue which has no effect on anyone else, **other than to become a symbol of what's wrong with being free.**