

Opinion: Importance of bike safety on the roads

By Fran Clader

May is National Bike Safety Month, and the California Highway Patrol is reminding motorists and bicyclists to share responsibility for roadway safety.

California's weather allows bicyclists to enjoy riding many months throughout the year.

Although bicycle safety should be practiced every day, the month of May has been set aside to draw awareness to how we can all help minimize bicycle injuries and deaths.

"As important as it is for drivers to be mindful of bicyclists, those who ride their bicycles, must exercise safe practices and ride smart," said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. "With all roadway users doing their part, we can help reduce the number of tragedies."

According to 2014 statistics from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, each year about 2 percent of collision victims are bicyclists. In a majority of the bicycle deaths, the most serious injuries are to the head, highlighting the importance of wearing a bicycle helmet. Helmet use has been estimated to reduce the odds of head injury by 50 percent. Bicyclists and motorists should be especially aware that a large portion of collisions that result in death occur in the late afternoon or evening. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that 48 percent of bicyclist deaths occurred between 4pm and

midnight.

Bicyclists on the roadway have all the rights and responsibilities of a vehicle driver and are responsible for complying with the law. Riders must also obey the laws of the road, such as stopping at stop signs and stop lights, and yielding to pedestrians. Riders can increase their safety by wearing reflective clothing, wearing a helmet, watching for parked cars, staying alert at all times, looking before turning, and riding with the flow of traffic.

In recent years, California has implemented traffic safety laws to help improve conditions on the road for both bicyclists and motorists. The Three Feet for Safety Act became operative on Sept. 16, 2014, and requires motorists to allow at least three feet of clearance when passing a bicyclist. Also, effective Jan. 1, 2016, the slow-moving vehicle statute was clarified to require any vehicle, including bicyclists, proceeding upon a highway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic, to pull off the roadway if it has five or more vehicles lined up behind it.

Motorists need to be aware of bicyclists on the roadways and take certain precautions when sharing the road. Drivers should follow a few safety tips to help reduce bicycle-involved collisions, such as: slow down, be patient, share the road, look twice for bicyclists, and expect bicyclists on the roadway.

Data from the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System shows that in 2013 there were 164 bicyclists killed in collisions statewide, which represents an 11.5 percent increase from the

previous year. Since 2013, the number of bicyclists killed in collisions has dropped each year.

In 2015, there were 133 bicyclists killed in collisions statewide. This represents a 23 percent decrease from 2013.

Although the number of bicyclists killed has declined recently, there are still too many fatal collisions occurring throughout the state. There is work to be done on the part of both bicyclists and motorists.

“With the monthlong promotion of bicycle safety awareness throughout the state, we hope to see the number of incidents involving bicyclists continue to decline,” added Farrow. “Through education, mutual respect, and observance of traffic laws we can help make the roadways a safer place for all.”

The mission of the CHP is to provide the highest level of Safety, Service, and Security to the people of California.

Fran Clader works for the California Highway Patrol.