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Motorcycle Season Revs Up, Riders Urged to “Gear Up-Ride Smart”

New Campaign Touts Staying Safe Through Proper Gear, Education

SPRINGFIELD – Spring is rolling in, the weather is getting warmer and motorcycles are emerging from winter hibernation. Before riders hit the road, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Illinois Motorcycle Dealers Association are reminding them to invest in their safety and “Gear Up-Ride Smart.”

As part of the annual “Gear Up-Ride Smart” campaign, IDOT and motorcycle dealers throughout Illinois are encouraging riders to make this motorcycle season a safe one by taking the time and necessary precautionary measures before they get back on their bikes. Seasoned riders and novice motorcyclists alike should check their cycles to make sure they are in proper running condition. They also can brush up on the rules of the road by taking advantage of the free motorcycle training classes offered by IDOT.

Motorcyclists are urged to wear the proper gear, including high-visibility (Hi Viz) clothing, eye protection, gloves, jackets, pants, boots and a U.S. DOT-approved helmet, at all times.

“Motorcycle fatalities account for almost 15 percent of all traffic fatalities in Illinois. That is far too many,” said Acting Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blankenhorn. “By taking the proper precautions before riding, whether it’s wearing reflective gear or enrolling in a refresher riding class, riders can do their part to help reduce traffic fatalities in Illinois. The lesson is simple: Gear Up-Ride Smart.”

Illinois is one of two states that offer free motorcycle training classes to licensed residents. Since the Cycle Rider Safety Training Program started in 1976, almost 400,000 riders throughout Illinois have learned the basics of motorcycle riding or taken advantage of the

opportunity to learn more about motorcycle safety.

The program, which has classes for beginner, intermediate and advanced riders, heavily focuses on the safety steps that need to be taken before riders venture out. Topics range from paying attention to personal health, such as staying hydrated and evaluating one's own medical condition before and during rides, to learning the essential riding rules and practices, including guidance on how to stay alert during rides and instruction on never assuming your motorcycle is seen by other motorists.

To learn more about IDOT's motorcycle safety program and courses, as well as the state's motorcycle laws and regulations, statistics, and additional educational materials, please visit www.startseeingmotorcycles.org. Check out this short video <https://youtu.be/NzxeeXJVI-s> for some helpful tips to give you a safe ride.

"High-visibility clothing isn't the only thing that will make you more visible," said Illinois State Police Col. Michael Zerbonia. "Make sure your signals and lights are working properly before you hit the road, too. Also be sure that warmer weather doesn't dictate what you wear while you are riding. You should always wear the appropriate safety gear no matter how hot it gets."

Jay Hall, president of the Illinois Motorcycle Dealers Association, strongly recommends getting motorcycles checked by a professional before they hit the roads, no matter how far the distance of the season's first ride. That check should include verifying that tires, fluids and brakes are performing optimally.

"Spring is here, but it's still not too late to get your bikes ready for all of the great, upcoming rides to come," Hall said. "Make sure to have those motors tuned up and the tires and brakes checked and replaced if needed. It's also important to have the suspension in top working order so your bike can take on those sudden stops and keep the tires in contact with the road. Taking this time to prepare now will make your rides that much more enjoyable."

Other "Gear Up-Ride Smart" statistics:

- Three percent of total vehicle registrations are motorcycles, yet motorcycle fatalities account for nearly 15 percent of all vehicle fatalities.
- About half of motorcycle rider fatalities occur in crashes involving just the motorcycle. About 40 percent involve motorcycle riders who had been drinking.
- Motorcycle fatalities increased from 148 in 2012 to 155 in 2013, according to provisional data. The number dropped to 118 in 2014, according to preliminary data.
- Motorcyclists need to be properly licensed and continue training, especially after a new bike purchase.

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