

News For Thought

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Military Requests Mandatory Training For Civilians

Combat injury or death are always possibilities in a war, but last year more U.S. Marines were killed here at home while off-duty riding motorcycles than from enemy fire in Iraq, prompting all military branches to require completion of rider training courses and mandatory personal safety equipment on and off base.

Now, in a move encouraged by military leaders at different Armed Forces bases, a bill is making its way through the North Carolina legislature that would extend the mandatory training requirement to civilians, making it tougher and more expensive to get a motorcycle license.

The legislation, Senate Bill 64, passed the State Senate on March 11. It would take effect July 1, 2010 and require would-be motorcyclists to pass a safety class before they can get a motorcycle endorsement on their licenses. The bill, which is currently pending in the state House, would also prevent riders from taking advantage of the "perpetual" learners permit by making it valid for just 6 months with a rider having one year to get a full motorcycle endorsement or quit riding.

It's estimated there are 48,000 motorcycle riders in the Department of the Navy, many of them choosing sport bikes which are designed for speed. Nationwide, the military lost 41 people to motorcycle crashes in fiscal 2001. That tripled to 124 in 2008.



Missouri Helmet Law Exemption Goes To Governor

The Missouri legislature has passed a bill modifying Missouri's mandatory helmet law to exempt persons 21 years of age or older from wearing protective headgear except when operating or riding motorcycles or motortricycles upon interstate highways.

Over the past twenty years proposals to repeal the mandatory helmet law have been controversial, but this year's measure to simply modify the law received little debate in either chamber. The House gave the bill final approval Wednesday, Apr 29 on a vote of 93-65. The bill easily passed the Senate earlier, with a 23-6 vote.

The measure now goes to Governor Jay Nixon for his final signature or veto. The helmet provision was amended onto SCS/SB 202, an act that provides that operating a motorcycle, in and of itself, shall not be considered evidence of comparative negligence in accident claims. The act also provides that when investigating an accident or settling an automobile insurance policy claim, no insurer, agent, producer, or claims adjuster of an insurer shall assign a percentage of fault to a party based upon the sole fact that the party was operating a motorcycle in an otherwise legal manner. The effective date would be August 28, 2009, and the helmet provision would expire in five years under a sunset clause.

Steve Carroll of Hannibal, MO, a spokesman for FORR-MO (Freedom of the Road Riders of Missouri) said passage of the bill is the result of a growing movement. "It's been a long time coming -- in the educational process -- and I think it's long overdue," he said.

Senator Luann Ridgeway, R-Smithville, who sponsored the bill in the Senate, said the helmet law was tantamount to a "nanny state making safety choices for other

people." Pointing to other injury-prone activities, such as skiing, horseback riding and even riding in a car, she asked why the state doesn't require helmets for those. "Where do we draw the line in terms of a caretaker state?" she said.

House sponsor Rep. Gary Dusenberg, R-Blue Springs, also said it was a freedom issue. The people the bill affects can "go off to war and carry guns under the flag of our country," said Dusenberg, a former highway patrol officer.

In 1999, then-Gov. Mel Carnahan vetoed a similar bill. Governor Nixon has refused to comment on the bill, but if signed into law Missouri would join 30 other states that allow most adult riders to choose regarding helmet use. Only two of the eight states surrounding Missouri mandate helmet use at all times. Neither Iowa nor Illinois has a helmet law.

CPSC Stays Ban On Sales Of Youth Motorcycles & ATV's

In denying a petition from the motorcycle industry to overturn a ban against the sale of youth-model motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) due to the lead content of some components such as brake parts and battery terminals, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) voted on April 17, 2009 to keep the ban in place but granted a two-year stay of enforcement to allow the continued sale of these vehicles while industry attempts to comply with the new federal lead-content rules.

Congress enacted the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 to protect children under 12 from the lead content of toys and other products intended for the youth market but, intended or not, the ban has crippled a huge segment of the motorcycle industry, costing an estimated \$1 billion a year as more than 13,000 dealers across the country were stuck holding millions of dollars in inventory.

The two-member CPSC board voted unanimously, citing safety concerns as the reason for issuing the stay; "A bigger safety concern than lead exposure is that the elimination of youth ATV sales will likely increase the number of adult ATVs purchased to be used by younger children, therefore increasing risk of injury and death."

The stay extends through May 1, 2011, at which time the products must be brought into compliance or the industry can demonstrate to the CPSC why it is technologically infeasible to comply. In the meantime, legislation has been introduced in Congress (H.R. 1587) by Representative Denny Rehberg (R-MT) to exempt youth-sized motorcycles and ATVs from the CPSIA. Help end the youth bike ban permanently by calling your members of the U.S. House of Representatives today and ask their support for H.R. 1587.

Musical Helmets

A European recycle program could turn music and movie disks into motorcycle helmets. A recycling plan proposed by the Swiss supermarket chain Migros aims to reduce the number of old CDs and DVDs landing in the regular trash by collecting and using them for an unrelated end product.

The recycling program aims to reduce the number of old CDs and DVDs destined for the dumpster. Collection points will be available across Switzerland, and they plan to shred the disks, using the resulting granular remains to make new products such as motorcycle helmets.

According to a store spokesperson, the discs contain the valuable petroleum product polycarbonate, and far too many of them end up in the normal trash. If the program is successful, an old Madonna CD or Brad Pitt movie could be made into head gear.

Weird News: Man Fakes Kidnapping to Find Stolen Motorcycle

After hours of searching for a toddler whose father claimed he was attacked by motorcycle thieves who abducted the child, police arrested the Florida man for fabricating the kidnapping to get police to launch an intensive search for his stolen motorcycle. According to The Gainesville Sun newspaper, Alachua County deputies took the 37-year old man away in handcuffs for filing a false report after his story unraveled during the manhunt and police learned that the 1-year old was safe with his mother.

Officers believe the man was the victim of thieves who posed as interested buyers and then took his gold-and-black Yamaha, so he told his wife to take their son out of day care and he then called police to report that the child had been taken.

"His thinking was if they thought my child was missing, there would be a more intensive search than for the motorcycle," a Sheriff's Office spokesman told the paper. The bike and the thieves are still at large.



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