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Law enforcement and safety officials are trying to reduce those numbers through a variety of measures. The bike safety classes teach such skills as cornering, emergency braking, proper following distances, riding in groups, avoiding alcohol and drugs when riding and wearing proper protection (jackets, jeans, gloves and helmets). They teach bikers they can do a lot to protect themselves by slowing down, watching for potential danger and learning how to stop and maneuver quickly to avoid obstacles. The safety program has nearly tripled its training during the past few years, Kiley said.

Erlewine said safe rider course instructors emphasize to new graduates that unless they already have had a lot of experience, they have only made a bare start on becoming accomplished motorcycle riders. "One of the things I say on the last day of the basic rider course is, you've taken the basic rider course, but that probably doesn't mean you're ready to ride to Devils Tower with 500 people or ride to the Main Street of Sturgis unless you brought a lot of skills to the class."

Ingemunson and Bush also said too many motorcycle riders - and car drivers - still are driving under the influence of alcohol. "Even excluding the rally, we make as many or more DUI arrests as we ever have," Bush said. "Just think about that," Ingemunson said. "You're on two wheels and start drinking a few beers. Think what that does to your balance and to your depth perception when you're coming up to these curves."

During the rally, campgrounds, casinos and other businesses for the past few years have offered shuttle service to downtown Sturgis and back for bikers who want to be able to drink and ensure they get home without damaging themselves or their motorcycles. Bush said more bikers are taking advantage of the shuttle buses and taxis in the Catch a Ride program. "Last year, it wasn't uncommon to see 50 to 60 people sitting there waiting for the buses."

"I think most of the riders who come to the rally are aware and try to be safe," Erlewine said. "But the people who accept a lot of risks, or show off, or drink and ride - they come to the rally, too. That's pretty scary."

AMA Applauds Nelly's Law

The American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) is applauding a new Massachusetts law that will introduce a motorcycle-safety-and-awareness module into the state's driver-training curriculum. The goal of the law, which was introduced and backed by the Massachusetts Motorcycle Association (MMA), is to help reduce crashes by increasing other motorists' awareness of motorcyclists.

Although officially designated as Chapter 124 of the Acts of 2004, motorcyclists have come to know the legislation as "Nelly's Bill," in memory of Nelson Selig, a Massachusetts rider who was killed when another motorist crossed into his path.

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney signed the bill into law on June 10, 2004; the law will take effect 90 days thereafter. The bill's main sponsors were State Sen. Bruce Tarr and Rep. Brad Hill, with numerous other legislators lending support.

"At the state level, motorcyclists in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are better off today, thanks to Nelly's Law and the hard work of MMA and its supporters," said Sean Maher, AMA Director of State Affairs. "And nationwide, motorcyclists will look to Massachusetts as a model of how dedicated motorcyclists can work together to protect our right to ride."

"We appreciate the AMA's invaluable help in making Nelly's Law a reality," said Paul W. Cote, MMA's Legislative Director. "MMA is proud to support AMA programs like 'Justice for All' and 'Motorcyclists Matter,' and we're gratified that Massachusetts is among the first states to support the goals of those programs with this new law."

The goal of the AMA's "Justice for All" campaign is to focus the public's attention on inadequate sentencing of drivers who seriously injure or kill motorcyclists, and to push for laws with tougher penalties when motorists' traffic offenses or criminal actions result in death or serious injury. "Motorcyclists Matter," originally launched to battle other motorists violating motorcyclists' right-of-way, has been expanded to include tougher penalties for motor vehicle-related felonies resulting in injury or death, and incorporation of motorcycle-awareness training in state driver-education curriculums.

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