

From the Office of the Sheriff: "Motor Cycle Awareness"

Summer time in Wisconsin brings with it many of our favorite pastimes. Fishing, music festivals, boating, and of course motor cycling, the latter of which has been very deadly thus far this summer. With two cycle fatalities in Dodge County so far in 2011 and dozens of others statewide, we must do something to prevent these crashes, most of which are a result of a motorist failing to yield the right-of-way to the motorcycle. In Dodge County, both motorcycle fatalities were innocent victims. This is foundation some cyclists give for the installation of loud exhaust and why others clamor for a mandatory helmet law in Wisconsin. So let's discuss these two issues.

State Statute 347.39 states "No person shall modify the exhaust system in a manner which will amplify or increase the noise emitted by the motor above that emitted by the muffler originally installed on the vehicle." Furthermore, no vehicle shall operate on a highway w/o adequate muffler, properly maintained to prevent excessive noise. A muffler is defined as a device with a chamber of baffles with the purpose of reducing noise.

As the owner of a Harley Davidson myself, yes, the first thing I did was replace the stock exhaust with one that "sounds better." Does it exceed acceptable decibel readings? It may, but I feel I drive responsibly, do not accelerate rapidly in downtown areas setting off car alarms, and I do not wake up the neighborhood when I come home late at night. I do receive numerous complaints from Dodge County residents about loud motor cycle exhaust and I agree that many have exhaust I would categorize as disturbing and it is those that are casting a negative shadow on all others.

Yet, when confronted the first line of defense is "I want people to hear me coming because so many of my brothers have been killed because there were not seen." Though there is a fraction of foundation for such an opinion it sure gives it some credibility. To figure that out here is the formula to determine the speed of sound -  $a = \sqrt{g * R * T}$ , go for it. Bottom line, as long as cyclists continue to be killed by those failing to yield, noisy cycles will be the norm. For those who abuse and show off loud exhaust, we will enforce the proper statutes at \$175.30.

Helmet laws, let's correct the opinions of many, Wisconsin does have a helmet law, a law that exceeds the requirements of several other states. Wisconsin is part of a group of 20 states that allow adults to operate w/o a helmet. It seems the question from critics after every motor cycle fatality is - Where they wearing a helmet? Trust me, I have been to numerous motor cycle fatalities, helmets can serve a purpose but in many cases would not have changed the outcome. We do talk about use of alcohol, seat belts, and other safety measures in our crashes but those are areas covered by law, not choice. Seat belts are law, driving drunk is against the law, and helmets are completely optional for adult riders. The media has never asked if a car had its headlights on during rain or was equipped with an airbag. Why? It's optional.

All of us can help prevent traffic fatalities by being responsible drivers. Look both ways twice, be patient, drive sober, and do not allow distractions to replace your concentration. Please, give every one a chance to enjoy our county roadways, especially our motor cyclists. Thanks for listening, [tnehl@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:tnehl@co.dodge.wi.us).