



Admiral's CORNER

FROM COMMANDER, NAVAL SAFETY CENTER



Why Motorcyclists Must Wear Their PPE

A 19-year-old, student E-3 wrecked his motorcycle. He was admitted to a hospital with broken right foot, arm and femur; a collapsed lung; and lacerated liver. According to eyewitnesses and the police officer at the scene, the E-3 suddenly had downshifted while rounding a curve at about 30 mph, causing the front wheel to slide out from under him. The bike hit the ground and slid under a parked truck.

A line-of-duty investigation concluded that the E-3 had purchased his motorcycle three days before the incident and had a motorcycle operator's permit. However, he had not completed the basic rider course, and he wasn't wearing all the required PPE (didn't have on gloves, long sleeves, and boots).

This mishap resulted in the E-3 losing 65 work-days, and he spent eight months on light duty for rehabilitation and recovery.

Elsewhere, a 21-year-old E-4 was giving his friend, a 20-year-old E-4, a ride to pick up the latter's motorcycle. The passenger E-4 wasn't wearing any safety equipment because his own was with his motorcycle.

As the operator was slowing for a red traffic light, it turned green, and the operator accelerated. The passenger was caught off guard, lost his grip, and fell off the rear of the motorcycle. He hit his head on the pavement, causing a laceration that required 12 staples to close; he also suffered road rash on his shoulders and back, all of which resulted in a 48-hour hospital stay.

As reflected in a Feb. 14, 2005 message issued to wing commanders and commanding officers during my tenure as CNATRA, I feel strongly about

people being held accountable for their actions, including those who choose to ride motorcycles. In that message, I warned:

"Motorcycle riders will wear all appropriate personal protective equipment at all times, both on and off base. This includes helmets and reflective vests/clothing and is mandatory for all military personnel, regardless of state statutes. Non-compliance will result in revocation of on-base driving privileges, citation for failure to obey a lawful order, and may characterize line-of-duty findings in the event of accident, debilitating injury, or death. Ensure this word gets out, as enforcement will directly affect the loved ones of those who willfully disobey these mandates and get injured or worse."

That tough stance was precipitated by the fact that between Feb. 6 and 14, 2005, there had been three fatalities within Navy Region South and NATRACOM—among them, two recreational and off-duty safety (RODS) deaths. Meanwhile, FY05 totals for Navy/USMC personal motor-vehicle and RODS fatalities stood at 44 and 10, respectively, on Feb. 14. In other words, 54 real people—fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, and shipmates—were gone forever.

I said then, "It must stop!" And, I still feel the same way.

RADM George Mayer