

# Motorcycle Rider Risk Management

By Mr. Fred E. Fanning

Can risk management be the solution to everything? Maybe not, but it can go a long way toward preventing fatal motorcycle accidents. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) has done a great deal of work to develop training programs to provide riders with the skills necessary to prevent motorcycle accidents. Riding a motorcycle can be a very dangerous sport or activity. However, by training properly and applying risk management, riders can help prevent crashes. The Army uses the MSF curriculum for motorcycle rider training as the standard.

## History

In the 25 April 2003 issue of *USA Today*, Jayne O'Donnell reported that motorcycle fatalities were up in 2002 for the fifth straight year.<sup>1</sup> She indicated that this was a 3 percent increase. Ms. O'Donnell obtained her information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which has two very interesting reports on this subject on its Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>.

In an article in the April 2003 *Countermeasure* publication, Master Sergeant Dave Hembroff raised the issue of motorcycle riders' risk of being involved in an accident.<sup>2</sup> He indicated that a rider who had not taken a rider training course was nine times more likely to be involved in an injury accident. Through February 2003, Army personnel had 18 motorcycle accidents for the fiscal year. Six soldiers died in those accidents.

## Conducting Risk Management

Accidents are normally the result of a series of events or factors that lead up to the accident. By controlling or eliminating some of those factors, the risk of being involved in a motorcycle accident can be greatly reduced. This is the process outlined in Field Manual 100-14, *Risk Management*, that we use for military operations and should use for all aspects of our lives. There are three primary areas that should be addressed in conducting risk management for motorcycle riding: rider factors, motorcycle factors, and road and traffic factors. See Table 1 for additional information. Each of these areas contains a number of factors that determine a rider's risk of being involved in an accident.

### Rider

Riders should always be prepared to ride the motorcycle. That may sound a little strange, yet it is true. The rider of a motorcycle must focus his or her attention on the task of riding the motorcycle as well as the actions of other drivers, wildlife, and the condition of the road—all at once. This is far more focus than any automobile driver puts into the task of driving.

The amount of time riders have on their motorcycles has a great impact on the potential for an accident. The more you ride, the better rider you become. As service members or Department of the Army civilian employees, motorcycle riders are required to complete a course that is offered at most

**Table 1. Factors to Consider in Risk Management**

Type	Factors
Rider	Experience, training, protective clothing and equipment, consumption of alcohol and drugs, and lack of sleep
Motorcycle	Size and fit and working condition
Road and traffic	Road and highway conditions

installations and provides basic information about riding. But don't let this be the only course you take. The more training you get, the better rider you will become. Go to <http://www.msf-usa.org> for more information about motorcycle rider courses in your area.

Army Regulation 385-55, *Prevention of Motor Vehicle Accidents*, lists the required items of protective clothing and equipment that each rider must wear. See Table 2 for a complete list. The quality of the clothing and equipment has a direct relationship to how much risk is accepted. Riders who purchase the bare-minimum clothing will reduce their risk of being injured in a motorcycle accident. However, purchasing quality motorcycle rider gear can reduce this risk even more. Helmets are a good example. Riders on a military installation must wear at least an approved 1/2-shell helmet. However, if they were to wear an approved 3/4-shell or full-face helmet, they could reduce their risk even more. The same thing goes for the shirt or pants. Riders can wear a regular pair of pants and a shirt with long sleeves and get by. But they would be much safer if they wore the new jackets and pants with ballistic protection sold by many manufacturers today. This ballistic protection is located in areas where the body is most likely to be injured in a crash. Using it will greatly reduce the risk of injury in an accident.

Since riding a motorcycle requires a great deal of concentration, it is surprising that many riders still drink and drive. If you plan to drink, don't drive.

Your chances of having an accident are far greater if you have been drinking. Riders should make sure they don't take prescription or over-the-counter medications prior to riding. Read the label, and if it has a warning about driving or operating heavy equipment or machinery, that means you don't ride. Along with these hazards comes the risk of riding when you're tired. As you know, it is very hard to drive a car when you're tired; it is much worse when trying to operate a motorcycle. You may think that you are riding fine until an emergency occurs and you can't react to it.

### Motorcycle

Even though you may be prepared to ride, is your bike ready to be ridden? First, does it fit you? And secondly, is it in good working order? Is the bike the right size for you? You can tell by sitting on the seat and putting both feet flat on the ground. If you can't do this, the bike is too tall. Now try to reach all the controls. You must be able to reach the handlebars, clutch lever, brake lever and pedal, throttle, and shift lever with ease. And is your bike in good working order? How do you know? The MSF has a pre-ride checklist that is represented by the acronym T-CLOCS:

- **T** – tires and wheels
- **C** – controls
- **L** – lights and other electrical items
- **O** – oil
- **C** – chassis
- **S** – side stand

**Table 2. Required Protective Clothing and Equipment**

Clothing and Equipment	Description
<b>Helmets</b>	They come in full face, 3/4 shell, and 1/2 shell. The Department of Transportation or Schnell Foundation must approve the helmet. The full-face helmet provides the best protection followed by the 3/4 shell. The 1/2 shell provides the least amount of protection.
<b>Gloves</b>	They should be leather and have full fingers. It is best to purchase motorcycle gloves because they are sewn to put the seams outside the glove and curve of the fingers.
<b>Shirts</b>	They should have long sleeves and be made of a durable fabric. Consider a jacket or riding suit with ballistic protection.
<b>Pants</b>	They should be long and made of a durable fabric. Consider pants or a riding suit with ballistic protection.
<b>Reflective materials</b>	Many use a road guard vest or jogging belt. The jogging belt is only visible when it is worn diagonally across the torso.
<b>Shoes</b>	They should be over-the-ankle boots or shoes, with no high heels. Consider a pair of motorcycle boots.
<b>Protective eyewear</b>	Don't rely on the face shield to protect you. Wear impact-resistant eyewear even if you wear a face shield. Invest in a pair of impact-resistant sunglasses.

By conducting this quick inspection and fixing the items that don't work, you can greatly reduce your risk.

### **Road and Traffic**

The last things to consider are the road and traffic conditions. You can choose the time and place you ride; make it the safest. Don't ride in areas with limited visibility or rough or sandy roads. These can cause or contribute to an accident. You may also want to avoid heavy traffic times. Most car and truck drivers are not watching for motorcyclists and often don't see them. Not riding in these time periods can reduce your risk.

### **Strategy**

In addition to identifying the hazards and eliminating those you can prior to riding, the MSF recommends a strategy for riding your motorcycle. The strategy is known by the acronym SEE.

- **S** – Search for hazards constantly as you ride.
- **E** – Evaluate those hazards first to determine if they have an impact on you, then develop a course of action for each.
- **E** – Execute the course of action you determined in the evaluation step.

Sound familiar? This is a constant update of the risk management process. The more you use it, the better you will become.

### **Summary**

Whether you are a new rider or have been riding for 20 years, you can become the victim of a motorcycle accident. You can reduce the potential for that accident by using the risk management process described in this article to identify and eliminate hazards. Don't become overwhelmed by all of the hazards. Riding a motorcycle is more dangerous than driving a car, and most—if not all—riders know this. To be a successful rider, control the hazards you can, and reduce your risk. Let motorcycling be fun and enjoyable.

For additional information, refer to the U.S. Army Safety Center Web site at <http://safety.army.mil/home.html> or the Motorcycle Safety Foundation Web site at <http://www.msf-usa.org>.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Jayne O'Donnell, "Traffic deaths rise to 12-year high," *USA Today*, 25 April 2003, p. A-1.

<sup>2</sup> Master Sergeant Dave Hembroff, "Learn and Live," *Countermeasure*, April 2003, pp. 16-18.