"THE LEGAL BRIEF"

Advice to the Guardians of the Great Lakes

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April 2009: BICYCLE LAWS AND SAFETY

With the rising cost of gas and increased attempts at attaining a healthy lifestyle, bicycling has become a more desirable means of transportation and recreation. The wellness and environmental benefits are undeniable. It is also essential to be aware of the rules of the road and general bicycle laws.

WELLNESS BENEFITS

- Increased energy
- Reduced stress
- Lower cholesterol and blood pressure
- Easy on the joints
- Burn 400-700 calories per hour even riding at a moderate pace

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Use less gas by biking more
- Better air quality
- Less traffic congestion
- Less wear and tear on your car

RULES OF THE ROAD

- Always ride in the same direction as traffic, even on sidewalks. In some states it is the law!
- Make yourself visible and your presence known by eye contact, signaling, and lane position
- Obey traffic signs and signals
- Never pass on the right
- Don't weave in and out of traffic
- Keep your bicycle in good repair

BICYCLE LAWS

Although laws vary from state to state, the majority of the states within the Ninth District agree upon the following:

- Bicyclists have all the same rights and duties as the driver of a motor vehicle; in some cases and states, **violation of motor vehicle law while riding a bicycle (including biking while intoxicated) can result in a citation!**
- Ride on the right side of the road as close to the curb as possible (barring obstructions)
- One person per bike (except approved child seats)
- Ride no more than two abreast in a single lane
- Do not carry anything that would prevent you from using both hands or maintaining control
- Never "hitch" a ride on a moving vehicle
- Yield to pedestrians
- When riding at night (or 30 minutes after sunrise and before sunset) you must have a white light in front visible for approximately 500 feet and a red reflector in back visible for approximately 100-500 feet. Better yet – buy a LED light. They are inexpensive and will make you stand out even in daytime.
- Use hand signals
    - Left: hand and arm extended horizontally
    - Right: hand and arm extended upward
    - Stop: hand and arm extended downward

HELMETS

The Safety and Environmental Health Manual requires anyone riding a bicycle on a Coast Guard facility to wear an approved bicycle helment. In some states, there are mandatory helmet laws. Law or no law, helmets are a good idea. The Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute estimates that 540,000 bicyclists visit the emergency room each year, and 67,000 of those have head injuries. 1 in 8 of those is diagnosed with brain damage.

Keep these tips in mind and you'll be safe and healthy, while adding more green to the environment and to your wallet.
Happy biking!