



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Biking basics

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As most of America begins to thaw after a long, cold winter, bicycle enthusiasts are undoubtedly gearing up and ready to hit the road.

Each May, organizations across America observe National Bike Month in an effort to raise awareness of bicycle safety. However, their target audience isn't just riders.

"Whether you're riding a bike or commuting in a car, we all have a responsibility to share the road safely and look out for one another," said Rhonda L. Shah, project manager, Traffic Safety Advocacy for AAA. "For cyclists, the month showcases the many benefits of cycling and encourages more folks to give it a try. And for motorists, the month reminds us to keep an eye out for bicyclists to help keep them safe, since bicycles are the most vulnerable of all vehicles on the road."

Annually, hundreds of cyclists are killed and tens of thousands more are injured in preventable crashes, according to information provided on AAA's website.

"Data show there's been a reduction in bicyclist deaths, but obviously with more than 600 deaths per year, there are risks associated with riding," Shah said. "Although most deaths occur as a result of crashes between bicycles and cars, crashes can happen anywhere — in parks, on bike paths and even driveways."

Head injuries are the most serious type of injury and most common cause of death for bicyclists, according to Shah.

"Bicycle helmets have proven to reduce the risk of head and brain injury when a crash occurs by as much as 85 to 88 percent," she said. "So, no matter your age, wear a helmet."

Not only are bicycle helmets recommended by cycling experts, wearing them is mandatory when riding on a U.S. military installation, according to officials in the Ground Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center.

Shah said that in addition to wearing helmets, bicyclists should always ride wisely by following the rules of the road: Be visible so drivers can see them, be predictable and stay focused and alert.

And no matter your experience level or age, Shah said cyclists should assess their skills before heading out.

“It may be a good idea to brush up on riding skills and rules if it’s been a while since you’ve cycled,” Shah said. “Adult cyclists who wish to cycle with small children and cyclists needing to transport cargo should investigate the various child seats and trailers available and determine which are safest and will work best for them.”

“Soldiers are being injured and even killed in bicycle-related accidents,” said Peggy Adams, program manager, Ground Directorate, USACR/Safety Center. “Since fiscal 2011, we’ve had over 100 Soldiers injured and two killed in these types of accidents. It’s important that Soldiers realize there are dangers associated with riding and take precautions to protect themselves.”

An avid bicyclist, Adams said it’s vital that riders wear brightly colored clothing to make sure others on the road see them.

“Reflective clothing and situational awareness have served me well in all my years of biking,” she said. “But you can’t stop there; never assume other motorists will see you. You need to bike defensively and keep your head on a swivel.”

With the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reporting a distracted driving epidemic on America’s roadways (in 2012, 3,328 motorists were killed in distracted driving crashes), Adams said incorporating risk management into a bicycle ride could be a life or death decision.

AAA has launched a “Share the Road” campaign to educate both riders and motorists. To learn more, visit <http://exchange.aaa.com/safety/bicycle-safety/>.

“At the end of the day, it’s about showing common courtesy and respect,” Shah said. “By doing so, we can ensure the two-way street is a safe street for everyone.”