



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



Bicycling Mishaps

♪“I can ride my bike with no handlebars”♪ — Flobots

As the weather gets a little more bearable, many of us pull our bikes out of the garage and take them to the streets. Biking is a great way to commute, get some exercise, or enjoy a nice ride, but as you'll read here, biking comes with its hazards. According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 1,000 bicyclists die and over 130,000 are injured in crashes every year. The following are some (*primarily lighthearted*) examples of service members who contributed to those statistics.



- **Bike VS Pedestrian.** A Marine was riding on base when another Marine stepped into the bike lane without looking for traffic. The cyclist crashed into his fellow Marine and flew over the handlebars, landing on his back. He suffered a broken pelvic bone due to his pedestrian compatriot's lack of situational awareness. *Never trust that pedestrians are going to look out for you. Pay attention and be prepared to react to others' inattention.*
- **Long-Term Effects.** A Marine was on a road bike when a vehicle pulled out in front of him. The Marine collided with the side of the car and hit his head when he fell to the pavement. He was wearing a helmet, so everything should be fine and no need to seek medical attention, right? Wrong. The Marine suffered a small intracranial hemorrhage (*that's an internal skull bleed for us non-medical types*), which manifested in the form of a seizure two weeks later. — *All right, Devil Dogs, there's a time to tough it out and a time to get checked out. Kudos to this Marine for wearing a helmet, but after a severe bike accident, the intelligent thing is to get checked out by competent medical authority.*
- **Pedestrians Strike Again.** A service member was riding home from work at 2100 in the designated bike lane when a group of teenagers jumped off the sidewalk (*darned kids!*). In an effort to avoid a collision with the youths, the cyclist hit the brakes hard — a little too hard on the front brake. The bike flipped over the front wheel and the service member went over the handlebars, receiving a hairline fracture on his arm. *There are two lessons here: 1) Again, never expect a pedestrian to be predictable, especially teenagers in groups — probably looking at their phones. 2) Using rear and front brakes in concert is vital for sudden stopping.*
- **Cyclist Fratricide.** A bicyclist was riding from one end of the base to the other. Little did he know, another cyclist was doing the same in the opposite direction. All would have been well if not for a pothole and a car. As the first cyclist was approaching a turn, he moved to the other side of the road to move out of the way of a vehicle coming from behind. He then moved further over to avoid a pothole. Because of a building blocking his view, he couldn't see the second cyclist coming around the turn in the opposite direction. Due to their closing speed, neither cyclist was able to stop. As they collided, the first bicyclist received a concussion and the other a sprained wrist and road rash. — *Riding quickly on a bicycle is not the time to let fate take the wheel (or the handlebars in this case). The report noted there were no lines to show lanes for traffic clearly, but that's no excuse for crossing so far over. When approaching a blind turn, plan for oncoming traffic or obstacles. It's better to slow down for better reaction time. On the road, a bicycle should follow the same rules as motor vehicles. Let the cars pass on the left, even if it requires slowing down.*
- **Bad Brakes.** A service member had been riding to work for several weeks with “spongy” brakes. He noted them early on but had never had a problem stopping the bike. While riding his

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regular route, he often cut across a gas station parking lot to avoid having to slow to take the sharper turn at the intersection (*instead of getting new brakes*). As he was departing the parking lot to get back on the road, a car turned from the intersection into the lane the bicyclist was about to enter. The cyclist was forced to turn away to avoid a collision, but the only place to go was toward a low two-foot wall that separated the parking lot from a short drop into an adjacent field. Because his brakes weren't fully functional and he had kept his speed through the parking lot, the cyclist had no chance to stop before hitting the wall. The spongy brakes scrubbed off some speed, but not enough to prevent the front

tire from popping upon impact and the cyclist from going over the wall. Fortunately, the field was soft grass and the cyclist only had minor injuries. That was good because he had to walk the bike the rest of the way home. — *It takes a certain degree of cockiness to know you have poor brakes and still ride full speed through a parking lot. It is imperative we recognize the hazards of riding a bike — and the importance of good brakes. Please take road hazards and brakes seriously.*

Key Takeaways

Cycling is a great way to get around or just get some exercise, but we have to recognize the hazards around us. A combination of moving fast and having limited protective barriers around you means a mishap on a bike has a much higher chance of injury. To avoid becoming a narrative in our database, or worse, we recommend heeding the following advice from the NHTSA.

Be prepared to head out. Make sure you are using a well-functioning bike that fits you. A bike that's too big or small will be difficult to handle. Check the brakes and tire pressure regularly. You wouldn't drive a car with faulty brakes, why would you ride a bike like that?

Wear appropriate safety equipment. Helmets and visibility equipment are two of the most important factors to consider. We are continuously learning about the severity of concussions, a helmet can help avoid one in the event of an accident. The second leading cause of bike crashes is bicyclists not being visible. The bright reflective gear may not be the most fashionable, but it's a lot better than the road rash or other injuries you might get in an accident.

Ride defensively - focused and alert. Drive with the flow and in the same direction as traffic. Other people, be they drivers or pedestrians, can't see you. You never know what they are focusing on. The pedestrians in these examples proved that to be the case. Do not text, listen to music, or use anything that will distract you or take your eyes off the road. There are plenty of hazards to deal with, don't make it harder to see or register them.

Ride predictably. Failing to yield to the right of way is the leading cause of bike crashes. Ride your bike where you are expected to be seen and in a way, vehicle drivers can understand what you intend to do. Again this means in the same direction and with the flow of traffic. It also means using appropriate arm signals when turning. Avoid or minimize sidewalk riding. This practice may seem counterintuitive to safety, but cars don't expect to see traffic on the sidewalk and are less likely to see you when backing out or turning. Sidewalks can also end unexpectedly, forcing you onto the road when vehicle drivers aren't expecting a bicyclist to pop out.

Follow the rules of the road. All states require bicyclists on the roadway to follow the same rules and responsibilities as motorists. Visit the NHTSA Bicycle Safety webpage for more by copying this link to your web browser: [Bicycle Safety: Bike Safety Tips for Kids and Adults | NHTSA](#)

And remember, "Let's be careful out there."

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