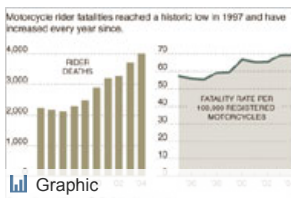


# Rise in Motorcycle Deaths Renews Helmet Law Debate

By MATTHEW L. WALD  
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WASHINGTON, Sept. 11 — Motorcycles make up far less than 1 percent of vehicle traffic but now account for more than 10 percent of highway deaths, partly because states are repealing helmet laws, the [National Transportation Safety Board](#) said Tuesday.

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Motorcycle Fatalities Rising

In 1975, 47 states required all motorcycle riders to wear helmets; now only 20 do, the board said.

“What did we know then that we don’t know now?” asked the chairman of the five-member board, Mark Rosenker.

Another member, Deborah A. P. Hersman, noted that the board itself was 40 years old and that in other modes of transportation, safety had improved.

“One would think that in 40 years, looking back at safety improvements, that all the low-hanging fruit has been picked, and what more could we do that was pretty simple and easy?” Ms. Hersman said.

Helmets fall in that category, she said.

Wearing an approved helmet cuts the risk of death by 37 percent, studies have shown. States that have dropped the requirement have seen helmet use fall by half, the board said. That and the popularity of motorcycles have pushed deaths up by more than 100 percent in the past 10 years, according to government statistics.

The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) has produced studies showing that death rates jump when helmet laws are repealed. But the laws are state statutes, and the agency is barred by Congress from lobbying states on safety issues.

The Alliance of Bikers Aimed Towards Education, a national group, has persuaded many legislatures to relax helmet laws.

Stephen J. Zurl, a spokesman for the state chapter in Pennsylvania, which ended its universal helmet law in 2003, said education, not helmets, prevented accidents.

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