

## **Are You Calling Out Road Conditions On Every Ride?**

Organized bicycle club rides routinely practice the courtesy or custom of calling out obstructions, debris, or dangerous road conditions. I want to give a big shout out to the clubs that routinely enforce this best practice. Based on the calls we get, however, it doesn't always happen in situations where people are riding with pickup groups or people they don't know or don't generally ride with.

Another important consideration is whether the warning about an obstruction or danger is conveyed all the way through the line to those towards the end. Every rider needs to be informed front to back. Here are some instances that have been conveyed to us illustrating potential dangers for someone not in the lead.

The first two involve bollards. These are generally poles installed on a trail for the stated reason of preventing vehicles from riding onto the trail. When these bollards are installed, they are required by code to be marked in a way to give someone reasonable notice that an obstruction is in the path ahead. These requirements are not always practiced, and many bollards have no surface warnings painted on the trail.

Consider a situation where two people are riding together, one slightly ahead of the other. They are approaching a bollard in the center of a trail. It's well seen by the lead. The first rider, however, is situated so as to perfectly block the view of the bollard by the rider behind. As both riders get close to the bollard, the lead cyclist simply turns slightly to avoid it while the person following has no opportunity to react and strikes the

bollard at cruising speed. This scenario can turn into a disaster, as I have personally witnessed.

In another bollard occurrence, a person is riding along with a group of people on a charity ride, and the riders are not previously acquainted with one another. The person involved is the last cyclist in a rather large group. As the group approaches the bollard, no one calls it out, and the last person in line hits it squarely at cruising speed. This accident could easily have been prevented. If the lead rider assumed the bollard was clearly in plain view and avoidable, he or she also needed to consider riders following behind that may not have had the opportunity to see it.

The same concern exists for road debris: boards and other dangerous objects lying in the bike lane. If, for some inexplicable reason, a rider in the lead fails to call it out, following riders won't be aware of the danger and potentially could be seriously injured.

One common concern is when a condition remains on the road so long people become accustomed to riding over it. This is not a problem until someone joins the group who has not encountered it before. For instance, a concrete truck washes out the contents of its load which runs across a road creating a large swath of rough, irregular ridges similar to a washboard. It was traversed by bicycle clubs on a regular basis and became well-known to those who had seen it previously and were prepared to deal with it. However, someone joined the group for the first time riding well behind the leaders and had never encountered it. The condition needs to be called out so that everyone is aware of

it. Crashes occur when we least expect them, but the harm caused may change someone's life. It's better to call out the obvious rather than run the risk of someone suffering because they were not alerted.

So this is just a reminder for each of us to be mindful of calling out all obstructions, debris, or road hazards so that every rider is aware of them. Each of us wants to enjoy riding and return home safely. Riding in a pace line can make it quite difficult to recognize potentially dangerous conditions that are otherwise in plain view to those in the lead. That means the dangers need to be detected in time—a safety precaution easily put into practice by calling it out on every ride.

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