

How Do We Respond to the Recent Cycling Tragedies in Florida?

The last few weeks have been hard on all of us. The terrible crashes in Venice, Davie and Mt. Dora caused multiple injuries and the deaths of Jack Harrison, Carlos Rodriguez, Denise Marsha and Donald Mosher. How do we process these events and how should the cycling community respond, both individually and as members of our respective clubs? In my view doing nothing is not an option. If we commit to do something, what is the best use of our time and energy?

It appears from all that I know the cyclists in Venice and Davie had every right to be where they were at the time they were struck. Each of them, no doubt, recognized the reality that our sport has its inherent risks and that each day we rely on drivers to obey the rules of the road and drive safely. If they do so, we will rarely be exposed to danger from them. The reality is there will always be some degree of human carelessness, lack of attention and distraction. I deal with this every day in my practice holding drivers responsible for the harm they cause. However, my thoughts today are what can be done to minimize and prevent these tragic events.

As club members, we can organize our clubs to let our collective voices be heard on issues affecting our safety, enforcement and infrastructure. Mark Schiefer, President of Gulf Coast Velo Cycling Club in Venice, has taken a big step forward by organizing the Safe Cycling Coalition. Mark has brought together all of the bike clubs of Southwest Florida (St. Petersburg to Naples), the Florida Bicycle Association (FBA), the Sarasota-Manatee MPO and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office to address issues of concern and take positive steps to address each of them. I attended their second meeting in mid-December which

produced at least five concrete things each participant is focused on accomplishing, including a major push to have club members join and support the work of the FBA.

Becky Afonso, the Executive Director of the FBA described the very significant energy and effort being made by bicycle clubs and other interested groups in South Florida, as well. In Central Florida, Tracy Draper, who lives in Eustis, is forming a group with a view of doing the same thing. There are, no doubt, other clubs throughout the state who have begun to organize in a similar way.

Individually, I encourage each of us to join the Florida Bicycle Association which is, in effect, the voice of Florida cycling throughout the state, and most importantly, in the legislature. Our E.D., Becky Afonso, has developed a tremendous reputation in Tallahassee on behalf of all issues affecting cycling and is a trusted resource. The FBA needs the financial support provided through individual and family memberships. Each member matters. Joining the FBA is a positive step all cyclists throughout Florida should take. Don't rely on someone else stepping up. Membership starts at only \$25 a year. The FBA needs your support in order to pursue the enactment of legislation to protect each of us, such as amending the Move Over Law to include people (cyclists), texting as a primary offense and a ban on hand held devices when driving. This is an effort we should all support.

Jim Dodson is a cyclist and an experienced injury & bicycle accident lawyer. Although his primary office is in Clearwater, he represents injury victims throughout Florida. He is a bicycle safety advocate and serves on the Board of the Florida Bicycle Association. He is also the author of the [Florida Bicycle Accident Handbook](#). For answers to you cycling questions, please visit www.floridacyclinglawyer.com.

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