

## **Riding on the Road is Less Dangerous than Reported**

It has been widely reported for years that Florida is the most dangerous state in the nation for cyclists. Four of our largest metropolitan areas have consistently ranked in the top five for cycling deaths and injuries. It is enough to make many people wonder whether riding on the road is worth the risk. The impact of this data is further enhanced by the rash of widely reported cycling deaths Florida has experienced in the past year.

We found an analysis which is very encouraging for road cyclists. In discussing traffic data in the Orlando Urban area in 2003/2004 the MetroPlan Orlando cited data from risk analysis consultants Failure Analysis Inc. in which they looked at fatality rates for various means of travel in 1993.

They concluded the fatality rate for recreational cyclists was extremely low when factoring out bicyclists demonstrating high risk behaviors like riding without lights at night, riding while intoxicated and generally disobeying traffic laws. Recreational riders who regularly follow the traffic rules, wear a helmet and use lights were far less likely to be involved in a fatal collision.

They compared the safety of various modes of transportation using fatalities per million hours. In doing so, airline travel had the lowest risk followed by school bus travel. Cycling was third. In fact, riding in an automobile was almost twice as dangerous as cycling when comparing fatalities per million hours of participation. Riding on a motorcycle was found to be exponentially more dangerous than riding a bicycle on the public road.

Mode	Fatalities per Million Hours
Airline Travel	0.15
School Bus Travel	0.22
Bicycling	0.26
Automobile Travel	0.47
Motorcycling	8.80

Everything we do in life involves risk. Road cycling is no different. While it is possible to simply get in front of the wrong driver, I consistently urge cyclists to take reasonable steps to increase the likelihood of being seen and decrease the likelihood of being hit by a vehicle. Those steps are as follows:

1. Wear highly reflective colors on your body, arms, feet and ankles. Doing so on your feet and ankles and below the knee enhances the driver's ability to pick us out from the surrounding visual clutter through the process of recognizing bio motion (a person riding on a bicycle). I recommend wearing a highly visible fluorescent colored helmet as well. My color of choice is neon yellow. The use of florescent colors was not even factored into the data discussed above and would, I suspect, reveal cycling to be even safer.

2. Always use a bright white light on the front (even during the day) and a bright rear tail light. Flashing front and rear facing lights are much more noticeable than a solid, static light. I recommend lights more powerful than the minimum required by statute which requires that the front must be visible from 500 feet and the rear from 600 feet.
3. Add flashing red lights behind each ankle. This increases the likelihood of being recognized as a cyclist because of the bio motion involved.
4. There are studies which prove that wearing highly visible fluorescent colors on the upper body (alone) reduces the likelihood of being hit by vehicle by 50%. Independent studies also show the same reduction in the likelihood of being hit by a car is achieved by using daylight front and rear facing lights. Using both is safest. Please, no wimpy lights that can't be seen. Drivers must be able to recognize your lights from the surrounding visual clutter from hundreds of yards away and with time to react to your presence. Don't get the cheapest light you can find, your life may depend upon it.

*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](http://www.floridacyclinglawyer.com).*

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