

Instructor Notes: Bicyclists have a reputation for disregarding traffic rules – running red lights, ignoring stop signs, and generally acting like they own the road. While it is a stereotype, it contains some truths that reflect the habits of even safe bikers. Use this opportunity to discuss how your towing operators can safely share the roads with all bicyclists ... even the bad ones.



Safety Meeting 2016 #8 – Different Spokes for Different Folks



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The rules of the road are often confusing, misunderstood and, sadly, ignored. It isn't out of spite – it's usually just lack of knowledge. However, when bicyclists don't follow traffic laws, they put themselves at serious risk. Every year hundreds of bicyclists die in traffic crashes involving motor vehicles and about 50,000 more are injured according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In 2014, 726 people lost their lives in bicycle/motor vehicle crashes – just over two people every day of the year in the U.S.

Bicycling advocates say drivers can play a big role in reducing those grim statistics, paving the way for peaceful coexistence, but it's a two-way street of course, and bicyclists have responsibilities too.

Growing Risk

Bicycling is rapidly growing across the country at astounding rates. Chicago now reports 20,000 people commute to work downtown daily on bikes. New York's bike share program recently launched with 6,000 bikes and 300 stations and after two weeks had 36,000 paid members. Biking is not going away and is something we're going to have to deal with.

Intersections and Bikes Don't Mix

While motorists and cyclists barely share the road together, they really have problems around intersections where about 45 percent of collisions occur mainly because some bike riders forget that traffic laws apply to them. To make matters worse, an average

light-duty tow truck weighs three to four tons, while the average bike is a mere 20 pounds. In any collision between the two, the bike always loses – period. Right or wrong, the cyclist is bound to get hurt so do your best to avoid them.

Which Rules Apply to Bicyclists?

According to the California DMV, "Bicycle riders on public roads have the same rights and responsibilities as motorists, and are subject to the same rules and regulations." When a bike is on a public road it must follow the same rules as if it were a car. That means stopping at stop signs and red lights, driving on the right side of the road and obeying speed limits and other laws. Yes, the DUI laws usually apply to bicyclists too. But not all state laws are the same. Consider that the state of Idaho allows cyclists to pause at red lights and stop signs and, if conditions merit, proceed with caution without stopping. In any case, your state laws may be different so be ready for this and be ready to stop.

Give Bikes Some Room

More than 20 states have passed laws requiring motorists to give bicycles on the roadway about three feet of space when driving near or passing. Bike riders really appreciate that and it gives you and them a little room to breathe. Expect cyclists on the road and treat them as you would any slow-moving vehicle.

More Safety Tips

- Don't rush. Wait until it is safe to pass a bicycle and refrain from tailgating.

If you must use your horn to announce yourself, do it from a safe distance.

- Allow extra time for cyclists to go through intersections.
- Recognize road hazards that may be dangerous for cyclists and give them the necessary space to deal with the problem.
- When parked on the side of a road, look before you exit your truck. Cyclists are terrified of being "doored." Before you open the door, look out the side view mirror on the driver side and be sure no one is approaching.

Wrap Up

Whether you are driving your tow truck, personal car or motorcycle, sharing the road with bicyclists is important. Remember to have patience when driving around a bicyclist so you don't make patients. One idea to consider is that if you can't beat them, join them. Ride a bike. It may just change your life. Riding is good for your health and good for the environment. At the very least, it will give you a better appreciation for the challenges cyclists face every day.

If you need any ideas on how to prepare and present this information to your drivers, please call me at 847-894-0042 or email me at pgratz548@comcast.net.

This article is a part of TowSafe, a safety program designed for tow-ers. For more information contact April at 407-706-6796.