May Is Motorcycle Awareness Month

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SPRINGFIELD – Gov. JB Pritzker has proclaimed May as Motorcycle Awareness Month in Illinois, joining the Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois State Police and motorcycle safety advocates to remind all users of the road to “Start Seeing Motorcycles.”

“Thousands of riders enjoy Illinois by motorcycle. During the coming months, it’s important to share the road, slow down and be aware of your surroundings,” said Steve Travia, IDOT’s Director of Highways and Chief Engineer. “By working together and following some simple rules, we can save lives.”

The Start Seeing Motorcycles campaign coincides with the arrival of warmer weather and more motorcyclists on the roads. With thousands of deaths each year, motorcyclists are significantly overrepresented in traffic crashes and fatalities.

Although motorcycles represent 3% of total vehicle registrations in Illinois, according to preliminary data, they accounted for more than 11% of traffic fatalities in 2022. There were 1,270 traffic fatalities in Illinois in 2022 – 146 were motorcyclists, 21 fewer than 2021.

During the riding season, Start Seeing Motorcycles banners and yard signs will be on display throughout the state, reminding the public to always stay alert for motorcycles.

“While motorcyclists are a statistically smaller portion of total roadway users, they represent a disproportionately higher number of fatalities on Illinois roadways,” said ISP Division of Patrol Col. Margaret McGreal. “ISP reminds drivers to be aware of the vulnerabilities of motorcyclists and encourages riders to get quality rider training and wear proper gear.”

All riders are urged to take precautions to ensure they stay visible to other motorists. This can be accomplished by wearing the appropriate protective gear, getting regular maintenance and taking advantage of IDOT’s free motorcycle safety courses.

As part of Motorcycle Awareness Month, IDOT recommends these steps to stay safe.

For drivers:

- Look twice before changing lanes or merging into traffic. Use your mirrors and look over your shoulder to be sure it is safe. Allow appropriate distance. Traffic, weather and road conditions require motorcyclists to react and maneuver differently.
- Drivers should allow motorcyclists enough space to maneuver and enough time to adjust if necessary.
- Motorists should always be vigilant. A motorcycle can easily be hidden behind other vehicles. Checking mirrors and blind spots is essential before merging or changing lanes.
- Use care when driving near a group of motorcyclists. Sharing the road with organized motorcycle groups requires patience and communication. If a driver needs to change lanes or reach an exit, they should signal their intention and wait for the motorcycle riders to create a space. Do not merge in between groups or riders unless there is enough space to do so safely.

Tips for motorcyclists:

- Wear DOT-compliant gear. Choose riding gear that increases visibility in traffic in addition to providing protection in the event of a crash. Use bright colors and retro-reflective strips or decals, especially at night. Over-the-ankle boots, gloves, protective jackets, pants, and properly fitted helmets with face shields or protective eyewear are all part of a full-gear package. Use lane positioning to increase your visibility to motorists. Ride with your headlight on at all times, it's the law in Illinois. Give yourself space and time to react. Allow room for emergency braking and for avoiding a crash. Make lane changes gradually and expect the unexpected. Ride sober. Motorcycle riding and alcohol don't mix. Drinking slows your reaction time and affects your balance, coordination and vision.
- Always signal before changing lanes. Avoid weaving between lanes. Flash your brake light when you are slowing down and before stopping.

Start Seeing Motorcycles is made possible by the teamwork among IDOT, ISP, ABATE and other organizations that promote motorcycle education, awareness and safety.

Visit startseeingmotorcycles.org for more information on IDOT's free motorcycle training and safety programs.