SUMMARY

A new bike safety campaign in Massachusetts, “Same Roads Same Rules”, is something to which we all need to pay attention. Bike Safety is not only about wearing a helmet, using lights, and having reflective clothing. No! For more information see [sameroadssamerules.org]. In addition, please read the link to a bike safety article written by NU’s Sustainability Program Manager who has been an avid cyclist since age 4!
BIKE SAFETY, NORTHEASTERN, AND BOSTON – WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAATTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT?

ARTICLE

Bike safety is big these days. Why? There are many interrelated reasons: significant increase over the last 40 years in the number of cars on America’s roads AND the number of miles driven per person per day; dramatic growth in bicycle commuting\(^1\); population growth; citizen-based steps to address climate change; noticeable increase of bicycle use across universities and college campuses; and a nascent bike culture in this country. In the United States, biking is still relatively safe – less than 2% of motor vehicle crash deaths are bicyclists\(^2\) and, interestingly, **90% of bicycle accidents do not involve motor vehicles**\(^3\) (most of us can go on and on about accidents resulting from bees flying down our shirts, bugs suddenly in our eyes, potholes, bumps in roads, bike/pedestrian accidents, oh – and the odd “interaction” with another bicyclist, right?!). What is important for bicyclists to note is that we are not like Europe where the bike culture is often entrenched in the daily lives of citizens (where they may walk, bike, drive, train, or even ski to work!) and there’s more infrastructure supporting bicycle riding/commuting. In the United States, there are regions, cities, towns, and communities where the biking culture does more readily include bikes but it’s not ubiquitous. So, in this country all commuters have a lot of work to do and specific to bicycling and safety part of the responsibility lies with bike users.

In Massachusetts, State Law requires helmets for **riders** under age 17 and **passengers** under age 5. But that does not include adults; in Boston, the City goal is to have all bicyclists use helmets. So let’s talk more about bike safety specifically for adults: I have to agree with Mass Bike’s newly publicized outreach program, “Same Roads Same Rules” as the most critical piece to bike safety in the United States - staying safe as a bicyclist means you must adhere to the rules of the road and remain visible to drivers at all times. How many times have you seen compadre bicyclists running the red-light and the cars have already begun to move? I have to cover my eyes because I can’t bear to see what might happen!

\(^1\) Deaths among bicyclists younger than 16 have declined since 1975, while deaths among bicyclists 16 and older increased 91 percent. Deaths of bicyclists younger than 16 were 13 percent of all bicyclist deaths in 2008. Source: http://www.iihs.org/research/fatality_facts_2008/bicycles.html#sec1

\(^2\) http://www.iihs.org/research/fatality_facts_2008/bicycles.html#sec1

\(^3\) David Watson, Executive Director Mass Bikes, Telephone conversation with author, 26 May 2010.
One bike activist group in California frames bike safety as a five part process:

- **Protected** (protect your head, use a good helmet)
- **Responsive** (respond to hazards)
- **Visible** (make yourself visible - use hand signals, lights, reflective clothing)
- **Cooperative** (share the road)
- **In Control** (control your bike – handling and equipping)

And then there’s the subject of bike helmets - who would have thought the subject would become so important over the past couple decades? Around Boston, how many of you ride helmetless? Just two days ago while walking outside the YMCA on Huntington Avenue, I saw 4 bicyclists in 3 minutes screaming down the street with no helmets on! I rode my bike all over the place as a child, teen, and young adult, never thinking about, using, or even having TRIED a helmet – even after someone died on one of my many bicycle hostelling trips; the accident was incredibly tragic, we were all 16 and 17 years of age, and Sarah’s death left a huge mark on all of us for life. And yet, we still didn’t make the connections with bike helmets. Now, with such a dramatic increase in vehicle ownership and use in the United States and the coinciding growth of bicycle as a transportation alternative, we need to talk bike safety all the time and help adults, teens, and children understand that BIKE SAFETY IS IMPORTANT, SAME ROADS SAME RULES, HELMETS, AND BEING SAVVY ON THE ROAD DO WORK! Helmets are one of the “seatbelts” we can use as bicyclists - in most cases they will save lives – and specific to helmets, they will often save your brain. How many times now I scratch my head watching helmet-less adults bike with their children who are wearing helmets – in fact, I actually know of someone who used to do

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4 [http://bikesafecalifornia.org/]
this until one of my sisters spoke with the parent about the issue. Guess what? The person was eventually hit by a car and in that case, their brain was saved because they WORE A HELMET. And while we’re on the subject, earphones + biking = danger. If you bike while listening through headphones, you will not hear the sounds and clues or be as aware as you would be without them.

Still skeptical and preferring fashion first, or missing the wind in your hair as you bike? Well, let’s look at some statistics:

- Bicycle helmets have been shown to reduce the risk for head injury by as much as 85% and the risk for brain injury by as much as 88%⁵;
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety states 91% of bicyclists killed in 2008 reportedly weren’t wearing helmets⁶;
- Nearly 90% of deaths from bicycle-related head injury result from collisions with motor vehicles⁷;
- Head injury accounts for 62% of bicycle-related deaths⁸;
- Pedalcyclist fatalities occurred more frequently in urban areas (69%), at non-intersection locations (64%), between the hours of 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. (28%), and during the months of June (9%) and September (12%)⁹.

In conclusion, we ask you to join us in promoting bike safety and education at Northeastern and spreading the word. Watch for NU Police Department’s bike safety information tables throughout the year. Read up on bike safety. Learn about “Same Roads Same Rules”. Use a well-fitted helmet. Night biking + lights + reflective clothing = a very cool idea! Using bike safety principles will help you avoid becoming a statistic. “Don’t let your brain be a stain on the road” (Please note: I did not make up this quote but I am unable to find its source).

This article was written by Carol Rosskam, Northeastern’s Sustainability Program Manager, who can be reached at c.rosskam@neu.edu or (617) 373-8730.

RESOURCES
http://sameroadssamerules.org (please check this out if nothing else!)
http://www.massbike.org (website for biking in Massachusetts)
http://www.bhsi.org/ (great information on helmet standards, how to choose a good one, components, etc.)
http://www.helmets.org/manual.htm (helmet information)
http://www.cityofboston.gov/bikes/resources.asp (great Boston-area resources)
http://www.bostonbikes.org/resources/bike-safety/ (great Boston-area resources and bike safety information)
http://www.bluecloudsolutions.com/activate/bikeboston/resources/ (great list of bicycling resources including safety, shops, trails)
http://www-nd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pubs/811156.pdf (provides statistics on bicycle safety, accidents, injuries, deaths, by age, gender, etc.)

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⁵ http://fha.maryland.gov/ohpetup/eip_bikeinjury.cfm
⁶ http://www.iihs.org/research/Fatality_Facts_2008/bicycles.html#sec1
⁷ http://www-nd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811156.pdf
⁸ http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00036941.htm
⁹ http://www-nd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811156.pdf
**Boston bike accident:** bike on left is a biker who stopped, bike on right is the back half of victim's bike and the front half of the bike was found up Beacon Street.