Crash Data and Countermeasures

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Pedestrians and bicyclists represent a significant portion of our nation's motor vehicle crash problem. In 1993, there were 5,638 pedestrians killed and 814 cyclists killed in traffic crashes, comprising 16 percent of all motor vehicle-related crash fatalities in the United States. For comparison, this would be the equivalent of a commercial airliner crashing with an average of 250 persons on board killed every two weeks for a year.

New York State's staggering 28 percent of the traffic fatalities each year that involve pedestrians or bicyclists (≈ 500 persons) is nearly double the national average. In addition, approximately 30,000 persons are injured annually as cyclists or pedestrians on New York State roadways, 11 percent of all traffic-related injuries.

Hospital emergency room studies have also confirmed what experts have long suspected, that a majority of bicycle crashes are not motor-vehicle related. According to a North Carolina study, the number of bicycle-related injuries might be 10 times greater than the numbers represented by available data

Those involved in traffic safety programs want to know what their educational message should include in order to reduce the severity and frequency of injuries to cyclists and pedestrians. A local study of crash data will identify trends and countermeasures pertinent to a specific region. If such a study is not feasible, the following, based upon national data, should prove beneficial to those designing educational programs.

Bicycle Crashes

While the demographics of bicycle-related injuries has remained consistent over the past several years, there has been a dramatic change in the age of bicyclists being killed. The number of bicycle fatalities has continued to decrease, but the proportion of adults killed has more than doubled. In 1991, two-thirds of all cyclists killed in traffic crashes were aged 15 and older. Two-thirds of those injured were under age 14.

Across all age groups, those killed are much more likely to be male. In 1993, 87% were male.

A majority of all bicyclists' injuries do not involve motor vehicles. However, 96 percent of bicyclists' fatalities involve a collision with a motor vehicle.

Nationwide, nearly half of all bicycle-related fatalities occur at night.

Most crashes involving children result from lack of compliance with traffic laws or poor driving skills on behalf of the cyclist. Motorist error becomes an increasingly significant factor in adult cyclist crashes.

Pedestrian Crashes

Older pedestrians (ages 70+) accounted for 18 percent of all pedestrian fatalities and had the highest death rate of any age group.

Almost 70 percent of the pedestrian fatalities were males.

Of all children between the ages of 5 and 9 years killed in traffic crashes, more than one-third were pedestrians.

Nationwide, 33 percent of all pedestrian crashes can be described as a dart-out. A dart-out occurs when the pedestrian enters the street in the middle of a block and either runs into or is hit by a moving vehicle.

Alcohol involvement (either motorist or pedestrian) was reported in almost one-half of the crashes resulting in pedestrian fatalities.