

Consumer Product Safety Alert

FROM THE U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207

Back to school safety alert

CPSC Urges Bicyclists to Wear Helmets

Each year about 800 bicyclists are killed and more than half a million are treated in hospital emergency rooms. In recent years, almost two-thirds of the deaths and one-third of the injuries involved head and face injury. About one-half the injuries to children under the age of 10 involved the head or face. Helmets may reduce the risk of head injury to bicyclists by as much as 85 percent. Yet, only about 50 percent of bicyclists wear helmets.

The purpose of a helmet is to absorb the energy of an impact to minimize or prevent a head injury. Crushable, expanded polystyrene foam generally is used for this purpose.

A bicycle helmet should have a snug but comfortable fit on the rider's head. Some helmets are available with several different thicknesses of internal padding to custom fit the helmet to the user. If a parent is buying a helmet for a child, the CPSC recommends that the child accompany the parent so that the helmet can be tested for a good fit.

For a helmet to provide protection during impact, it must have a chin strap and buckle that will stay securely fastened. No combination of twisting or pulling should remove the helmet from the head or loosen the buckle on the strap. Children should be instructed to always wear the helmet level on the forehead, not tilted back. The chin strap should be adjusted correctly and firmly buckled.

Helmets manufactured after March 1999, are required by federal law to meet the CPSC standard. When purchasing a helmet, consumers are urged to examine the helmet and accompanying instructions and safety literature carefully. Consumers should also look for a label stating conformance with the CPSC standard.

Bicyclists should avoid riding at night. If you must ride at night, install and use front and rear lights on the bicycle and wear clothing with reflective tape or markings. These precautions are in addition to the reflectors that the CPSC requires to be on the front, rear, pedals, and wheels of bicycles.

Many bicycle-car crashes can be avoided by applying the rules of the road and by increasing attentiveness of cyclists and motorists. Bicyclists have a legal right to share the road, but they are often not noticed in traffic. Drivers should always keep an eye out for bicyclists, especially when turning, merging, changing lanes, or entering intersections.

