

Breakout 2: Motorcycle Safety

Moderator: Patricia Turner, Center for Transportation Safety, TTI

Session Summary:

Because head injuries are common among fatally injured motorcyclists, helmet use is important. This session focused on motorcycle safety and helmet use. The four presenters provided participants with background on why motorcycle deaths continue to rise and the importance of helmets in preventing traumatic brain injuries in the event of a crash.

Kenneth Copeland, NHTSA Region 6, opened the session with a presentation that both illustrated US and Texas trends related to motorcycle fatalities and provided explanations of why motorcycle fatalities have increased for the 10th consecutive year. Motorcycle fatalities now account for 13% of total traffic fatalities. While increases in registrations are partly to blame, alcohol, improper licensing and training, lack of visibility, driver inattention, and lack of helmet use are also major contributors to climbing motorcycle death rates.

Mary Carlile, M.D., Medical Director of the Baylor Institute for Rehabilitation, discussed the history of motorcycle helmet laws and several issues related to motorcycle helmet use including the risk and severity of head and spinal cord injuries; the effect of helmet use on vision and hearing and whether there is an adverse affect on safety; and the effect of motorcycle helmet use in reducing hospital treatment costs and length of stay. Dr. Carlile's presentation concluded with a discussion of findings based on Texas Trauma Registry data that shows that non-helmeted riders are 2.2 times more likely to incur a traumatic brain injury resulting from a motorcycle crash than helmeted riders.

Joanne McGee, Ph.D., Clinical Director, ResCare Premier Texas and Jane Boutte, Ph.D., Vice President, Pate Rehabilitation, provided a two-part presentation titled *What's So Special About Head Injuries?* With the return of wounded soldiers from the current Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom conflicts, Dr. McGee noted, public awareness of traumatic brain injury has increased significantly. However, most do not yet recognize the magnitude of the effects of brain injury and their impact throughout the lifespan. Her presentation provided information about how the brain is injured and the effects of injury on daily functioning. Dr. Boutte's presentation helped participants gain a deeper understanding of brain injury and its course by detailing a non-helmeted motorcyclists' rehabilitation following a crash.