

Biking without a helmet—an accident waiting to happen

VANCOUVER, BC, March 22, 2008 — The British Columbia Medical Association (BCMA) and the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) are launching a public safety campaign to promote the usage of bike helmets. Bike helmet laws exist in most of Canada as well as 21 U.S. states and Australia. Although the bike helmet law has been on the books in BC since 1996, a large percentage of cyclists still don't wear them.

To enforce the bike helmet law, the police will be conducting random spot checks of bicycle routes throughout urban centres in British Columbia. Meanwhile, several speakers—including victims of bike collisions—will be speaking at schools about the dangers of riding without a helmet. Also, public service announcements about bike helmet safety will be aimed at any remaining cyclists who defy the bike helmet law.



“Statistically speaking, cyclists can expect to have an accident within their next 4,500 km of riding,” said BCMA President Sheila Provost. “The costs involved in such accidents are not only personal, but they can affect the family and put undue strain on health care. The tragedy is that head injuries are preventable.”

“It is a fact that bike helmets reduce serious head injuries by about 35%,” added ICBC President Stuart Harvey.

Cyclists often fall in four different ways: they can come to a sudden, unexpected stop; they can skid on a slippery surface; their front wheels may divert, as when it gets caught in a rut; or they can simply lose their balance. Each of these ways can cause a serious collision that potentially damages the brain.

Brain injuries caused by such collisions are extremely serious, as many interconnecting networks are torn when the brain strikes against the skull during a collision. Due to its vastly different nature, the brain does not heal as easily or as quickly as the rest of the body.

Bike helmets work by absorbing the force of an impact, diluting that force by spreading it across the entire helmet. The polystyrene inside the helmet crushes during an impact, cushioning the blow to the head. The plastic outer shell helps the helmet skid easily on pavement to avoid jerking the rider's neck.

There are different types of bike helmets, each one certified either by the Canadian Standards Association, Snell, or the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Helmets designed for other sports cannot be used in place of bike helmets, as they do not provide adequate protection for cyclists.

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