

Insurance Times: **Motorcycle deaths reflect change in rider demographics**

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Pedestrian and other kinds of deaths in motor vehicle crashes are generally declining, but deaths of motorcyclists have been increasing since 1997. In recent years, the age mix of fatally injured motorcyclists has changed. More of the riders who get killed are in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, and fewer are in their teens and 20s. As a result, the proportion of all fatally injured riders 40 and older was 40 percent in 2000, up from 14 percent in 1990. Nationwide, deaths of motorcyclists 40 and older jumped dramatically from 1997 to 2000, the latest year for which statistics are available. The increase during the last three years exceeds 65 percent, and the overall increase in deaths among older motorcyclists since 1990 exceeds 150 percent. Until 1997, the increase in deaths among older riders was more than offset by declining deaths among younger riders. But since then deaths among younger motorcyclists have been increasing.

The median age of motorcyclists killed nationwide is 36 years old, up from 27 in 1990. This shift isn't because of the aging of the population. It reflects the changing demographics of motorcycle riders. Surveys show cycle owners aren't as young anymore. Increasingly they're older, affluent professionals. According to the Motorcycle Industry Council, the typical U.S. bike owner now is about 38 years old compared to 24 years old in 1980.

The repeal of helmet use laws in some states and weakening of the laws in other states are contributing to the increases in motorcyclist deaths. In the early 1970s, virtually all states had laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets, but by 1980 most states had abandoned or limited their laws.

Now only 20 states and the District of Columbia have mandatory helmet use laws covering all riders while 27 states have limited laws applying to younger riders.