

Riders Helping Riders: An Alcohol Peer Intervention Program for Motorcyclists

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Abstract

The Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) conducted a focus group study for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to identify potentially successful approaches to preventing drinking and riding. NHTSA subsequently contracted with PIRE to conduct a program which would be based on findings of the focus group study. As of this writing that project is ongoing. Under this project, a motorcycle safety training program, currently called *Riders Helping Riders*, has been developed and pilot tested. The program is based on the findings that riders tend to view themselves as a community of people that looks out for each other but that, for various reasons, riders are hesitant to intervene in the drinking and riding behavior of the peers. The program intends to communicate to riders: 1) the extent of the drinking and riding problem, 2) the need for riders intervene in the drinking and riding behavior of their peers and, 3) “tools” that riders can use to help prevent the drinking and riding of their peers. This presentation will describe the *Riders Helping Riders* program. Under the contract with NHTSA, PIRE is also conducting an evaluation of the program. However, since the project is ongoing, it will not be possible to discuss findings of that evaluation.

In 2003, the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) was given a contract by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to develop and evaluate a program designed to encourage motorcyclists to increase their intervention in the drinking and riding behavior of their motorcycle-riding peers. This project is based on the results of a focus group study, conducted by PIRE for NHTSA (Becker, et. al., 2003), which found that motorcyclists were predisposed to help fellow riders in general, but were limited in their willingness to extend this attitude to drinking-riding intervention. The program, called "Riders Helping Riders," makes the case that, because riders are inclined to help other riders, and because drinking riders need help to avoid drinking and riding, riders need to take steps to prevent their fellow riders from riding after drinking. It is hoped that this program can have a positive effect on alcohol-involved motorcycle crashes.

The program is designed to be administered in one 35-minute classroom session. It has been designed to function in much the same way as current Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) safety classes, though it is not officially an MSF product, nor is intended to take the place of the current MSF drinking and riding classroom material. The MSF is aware of the program and has expressed its willingness to have the program included alongside its regular material in MSF classes. The program has also been designed so that, with some modification, it could be used by instructors who have been invited to give safety talks at rider group meetings (e.g., Harley Owners Group and Honda Road Riders meetings). A modified version could also be presented at seminars or at booths at motorcycle rallies.

The program was initially developed by PIRE, and pre-tested in Maryland where PIRE is located. It was then taken to South Carolina, greatly refined and further pre-tested with assistance from staff of the South Carolina Rider Education Program.

In November of 2005 a state-wide pilot test of the program began in the State of Georgia, with the implementation of the program by the Georgia Motorcycle Safety Program.

Instructor and Student surveys have been designed to be used by instructors and students to provide feedback on the program. Instructor surveys will be analyzed to determine how well the program is working and being accepted by students. Student surveys will be analyzed to determine effects of the program on students' willingness to intervene in the drinking and riding behavior of their peers. Additionally, PIRE will conduct an analysis of alcohol-related motorcycle crashes in Georgia to determine whether the program has had an effect.

The curriculum is intended primarily to encourage and enable riders to intervene in the drinking and riding of others. However the information will also be useful in helping riders recognize the need to address their own potential for drinking and riding, and for group leadership responsible for planning events and making group policies.

The curriculum will:

Address the need for peer intervention in drinking and riding by discussing:

- Alcohol-involved motorcycle crash statistics
- The increased likelihood of crashing compared to driving a car when impaired
- The increased severity of crash compared to crashing in a car
- The inability of impaired riders to judge their own impairment
- The consequences to riders of not intervening with impaired peers

Address issues raised by participants in the NHTSA focus group study, including:

- Communicating to new or returning riders that most experienced riders do not consider drinking to be an integral part of the riding experience
- Riders who drink and ride are not risking just hurting themselves, but also risk damaging or losing their motorcycle, causing economic hardship for their families, and causing emotional pain to families and friends
- Riders don't need to be killed or injured, or even crash, to create hardships – the consequences of drinking riding arrests can result in costs to the family, as well as towing-related damage to motorcycles, and/or impoundment of motorcycles.
- Provide the message that riders can, and should go farther in preventing drinking and riding of peers than they are currently. For example, separating impaired riders from the group is not sufficient. It may help protect the group but doesn't protect the impaired rider.

Provide techniques for implementing peer intervention, including:

- Providing suggestions for alternatives to drinking, e.g., alcohol-free poker runs, and other events.
- Recognizing impairment -- allow interveners to deal with impaired riders as early as possible by providing techniques for recognizing impairment, e.g., through drink counting, and visible cues of impairment both on and off the motorcycle. These techniques could be valuable at any time, but especially at any club-sponsored events where alcohol is served, and therefore trained club members have the ability to control the amount of alcohol being served.
- Encouraging alternatives to drinking -- if a potential problem rider is identified, interveners need to have available alternatives to continued alcohol consumption.
- Discouraging impaired riding – if a rider becomes impaired, interveners need to be ready with information and techniques for convincing the rider not to ride, and alternatives to riding, such as facilities for securely storing or safely transporting, motorcycles.
- Preventing impaired riding – if all else fails and an impaired rider insists on riding, interveners need to be aware of techniques to prevent impaired riding, e.g., setting policy requiring keys to be surrendered prior to drinking, or disabling the motorcycle.

The program also contains an optional section with scenarios for role playing, to provide students with the opportunity to practice what they've learned in class. At the conclusion

of the program riders are provided with a wallet-sized card containing information useful in preventing the impaired riding of their peers, and a pledge to intervene in impaired riding, which they are asked to sign.

REFERENCES

Becker, L. R., McKnight, A. S., Nelkin, V. S., & Piper, D. L. (2003, February). Drinking, riding, and prevention: A focus group study (Final Report DOT HS 809 490). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.