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## **New Study: Motorcycle Deaths Down Dramatically in 2009** ***Fatalities Decline at Least 10%; First Drop in 12 Years***

WASHINGTON, DC -- A report released today by the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSAs) reveals that motorcycle fatalities declined in 2009 by at least ten percent. Based on preliminary data, GHSAs is projecting that motorcycle fatalities declined from 5,290 in 2008 to 4,762 or less in 2009. The projection is based on data from 50 states and the District of Columbia. The declines come on the heels of 11 straight years of dramatic increases in motorcyclist deaths.

The new report -- the first state-by-state look at motorcycle fatalities in 2009 -- was completed by Dr. James Hedlund of Highway Safety North. Dr. Hedlund surveyed GHSAs members, who reported fatality numbers for every state. While data are still preliminary, most states have quite complete fatality counts for at least nine months, making GHSAs confident to forecast that deaths are down at least ten percent for the full year.

GHSAs is projecting declines in approximately three-fourth of states. The declines are notable in many states and in every region of the country. In California, for example, based on data for the first nine months, motorcycle deaths are predicted to be down 29 percent, while Florida and New York are down 27 and 16 percent, respectively.

As part of the report, GHSAs members were asked to suggest reasons for the decline. States offered several reasons, including: less motorcycle travel due to the economy, fewer beginning motorcyclists, increased state attention to motorcycle safety programs, and poor cycling weather in some areas. According to GHSAs Chairman Vernon Betkey, "Clearly the economy played a large role in motorcycle deaths declining in 2009. Less disposable income translates into fewer leisure riders, and we suspect that the trend of inexperienced baby boomers buying bikes may have subsided."

Betkey notes that, as with decreases in the overall highway fatality rate, progress with motorcyclist deaths can be attributed to more than just the economy. According to Betkey, "Multiple states indicated that because of the increases in motorcyclist deaths from 1997-2008, addressing this area has been a priority for state highway safety programs." As more than half of motorcycle fatal crashes do not involve another vehicle, states have been increasingly funding targeted enforcement to ensure that motorcyclists are in compliance with laws regarding endorsements, required insurance and helmet usage. State and federal governments also have stepped up efforts to address drunk motorcyclists.

GHSAs cautions that the declines in 2009, while significant and noteworthy after 11 years of

increases, represent only one year of data, and much more work needs to be done to continue to achieve declines. According to Chairman Betkey, "We will need to see three to five years of decline before we are ready to say that a positive trend has developed." The new report notes that motorcycle fatalities have significantly decreased in the past, only to rise again. For example, from 1980-1997, motorcyclist deaths dropped almost 60 percent. Sadly, those gains were wiped out during the period of 1997-2008.

To continue progress, the report notes that states need to support efforts that do the following:

- **Increase Helmet Use:** The most recent data indicated that 41 percent of fatally-injured riders were not wearing helmets despite their proven effectiveness. Thirty states still do not have helmet laws covering all riders.
- **Reduce Alcohol Impairment:** Highly visible drunk driving enforcement that includes motorcyclists should be encouraged as should be training efforts that help police identify impaired motorcyclists.
- **Reduce Speeding:** According to the most recent data, 35 percent of motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes were speeding. More than half of all motorcycle fatal crashes did not involve another vehicle, and speeding likely contributed to many of these.
- **Provide Motorcycle Operator Training to All Who Need or Seek It:** While all states currently conduct training courses, some areas may not provide enough course openings at the places and times when riders wish to be trained.

Preliminary data from 39 states that provided monthly totals are included in the report. Eleven other states and D.C. provided the researcher with preliminary annual totals; this information is available from GHSA.

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Download the report: [Motorcyclist Traffic Fatalities by State: 2009 Preliminary Data](#)

The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA)<sup>®</sup> is a nonprofit association representing the highway safety offices of states, territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. GHSA provides leadership and representation for the states and territories to improve traffic safety, influence national policy and enhance program management. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans. Contact GHSA at 202-789-0942 or visit [www.ghsa.org](http://www.ghsa.org).