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Bikers want tougher laws for motorists

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TAMPA - Motorcyclists from around Florida rolled into Tallahassee Monday and went to work lobbying for a variety of issues, including helmet laws.



Florida does not require bikers to wear helmets as long as they are 21 years of age and have insurance coverage of at least \$10,000 for injuries sustained on a motorcycle.

ABATE of Florida wants to keep it that way.

The group's president, "Doc" Reichenbach, says the group gets some flak occasionally for opposing helmet laws. But he says motorcycle deaths dropped about 25 percent in 2009 after ABATE sponsored an aggressive marketing campaign about motorcycle safety.

He says state statistics show that among the motorcyclist deaths that year, 35 percent were not wearing helmets and 65 percent did wear helmets.

Longtime bikers like Tony Acosta know that on the road, one wrong move can lead to disaster.

"You're coming up this way and they're not looking, and they swerve over and (clap) it's lights out," he says, describing conditions on the road.

Acosta owns Speed Kings, and he's been riding motorcycles for 20 years. He says if it weren't for his helmet, he wouldn't be here.

"There's a lot of things to look out for. You have to basically drive like everybody's out to kill you," Acosta says.

Florida's helmet law was repealed years ago. Now, you don't have to wear one, and bikers are rallying in Tallahassee, hoping to keep it that way. They point out that motorcycle deaths have actually dropped in Florida by about 25 percent.

"Now what does that tell you? It's safer to ride without one, or safer to ride with one? I leave it to you. What I tell you is, it's your right to decide for yourself," ABATE's Reichenbach said.

ABATE is also pushing for tougher penalties for drivers who hit motorcyclists and cause a death.

But many motorists say reckless, speeding cyclists are a problem.

"I've seen them especially on I-4, I know I'm doing 70. They're doing at least 80-90 miles an hour," driver Carmen Fleming said.

Acosta says the daredevils gives responsible bikers a bad rap.

"You always get that one guy who's just trying to show off. And just driving reckless. Not caring about other drivers," he says.

Most, he says, do care or they risk learning the hard way.

"You'll see guys driving down the road wearing flip flops and a tank top. No helmet. No eye protection and it's just, I don't think they've ever been in an accident before for them to know what can really happen from not wearing the gear," Acosta said.

Source: <http://www.myfoxtampabay.com/dpp/news/local/hillsborough/bikers-want-tougher-laws-on-motorists-04112011>