

ATV Safety Issues

Since their introduction to the public four decades ago, All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) have become increasingly popular. They are very appealing to riders because of the amount of danger one feels while riding. This danger, however, should not be taken lightly. ATVs carry with them a number of safety issues which every rider ought to be concerned about. Despite the ongoing effort of ATV companies to make these vehicles safer, accidents are still happening on an all-too-regular basis.

ATVs originally came as both 3-wheelers and 4-wheelers. It did not take long, though, for the industry and the public to realize the risk of the 3-wheeler. With no true center of gravity, the 3-wheeler was an accident waiting to happen. It was widely assumed that once ATV companies permanently removed the 3-wheeler from the market, accidents would sharply decrease. While there has been a decrease in the number of deaths and injuries due to 4-wheel ATVs, enough have happened that the vehicle's safety is still a legitimate concern within the industry. For example, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) revealed that in 2004 alone, there were an estimated 136,000 serious injuries in the United States that were directly related to ATVs. The preceding year, 2003, saw 740 people lose their lives due to ATV accidents.

The troubling aspect of this rather high number of deaths and injuries attributed to ATVs is that the industry and the CPSC recently agreed on a series of action plans designed to improve ATV safety. These action plans represent an agreement between the ATV industry and the CPSC to crack down on several issues that affect the safety level of ATVs. Some of the things that are now required of companies that sell ATVs are the labeling and safe marketing of ATVs. In addition, the CPSC has been given more say as to what ages may ride certain types of ATVs. The problem, however, is that a large number of companies that manufacture and distribute ATVs are based in Asia and Italy. Because of their international status, they are not required to abide by the laws of the CPSC. In other words, many of the companies that are making ATVs are exempt of any oversight by the U.S. government.

Due to the CPSC's inability to control the safety guidelines concerning the ATV industry, focus has now shifted to state control over the age of riders. Many states have recently enacted legislation that specifically governs the usage of ATVs on state-run land. Some of the factors that states deal with are the ages of riders and the type of engines they use. Several states mandate that the use of machines greater than 90cc by riders under the age of 16 is strictly prohibited.

Those who criticize these blanket policies concerning riders' ages claim that

these rules do not adequately address the issue. For example, critics claim that many early teen males are bigger and sometimes stronger than fully-grown adult females. To protect themselves from this line of thinking, some states are simply prohibiting any minors (those under the age of 16) from driving ATVs. Advocates of ATVs, however, argue that training riders at an earlier age only stands to improve safety. They argue that children exposed to ATVs at an early age will gradually gain the expertise necessary to be safe drivers of ATVs when they reach adulthood.

In 1988, the All-terrain Vehicle Safety Institute (ASI) was formed. This organization seeks to address ATV safety issues by providing training and education for ATV riders. Most states now require that new users of ATVs undergo this type of training. This is one more in a series of attempts by the industry and the CPSC to improve the safety of ATVs. The need to do provide instruction in ATV riding and driving increases as the sport's popularity continues to grow.

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Word count 642