

Traffic school for errant cyclists rolls into Santa Cruz

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SANTA CRUZ -- Errant bicyclists, those who get ticketed for riding on the wrong side of the street or cruising through a stop sign, can now go to traffic school to avoid a hefty fine—and pick up some safety pointers.

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition of Santa Cruz County has launched a program similar to the traffic schools motorists attend to prevent points from going on their record that allows cyclists to attend traffic school for \$35. Attending the two-hour class allows bikers to escape paying a ticket, which can run \$100 to \$200.

"We're a university town with a lot of bikes on the road and a lot of injuries," said Corinne Hyland of the county health department. "We want to capture that audience and give them some education."

Under state law, bicyclists are required to follow the same rules of the road as cars. The most common cycling violations are people riding on sidewalks, failing to stop at a light or stop sign and not having appropriate lights and reflectors after dark, according to authorities.

Santa Cruz police say they also cite a lot of people who ride the wrong way on Pacific Avenue.

There were 154 bicycle injuries in Santa Cruz County in 2006, according to stats from the Community Traffic Safety Coalition. The majority of those injuries, roughly 82, occurred in Santa Cruz.

The most recent bicycle fatality happened in January when college student Lucian Gregg was killed as he rode his bike down East Cliff Drive, apparently colliding with a delivery truck. Pacific Collegiate School teacher John Myslin died last summer when he collided with a truck while riding his bike on Mission Street.

Santa Cruz police write up to 30 bike tickets each month, which police Sgt. Jack McPhillips attributes to the large number of UC Santa Cruz students riding around town, often not abiding by the rules.

"We write tenfold the number of bike tickets than what any other local agency does," McPhillips said. "It's for safety. You can repair a car, but you can't repair a body that's been damaged."

Saskia Lucas, a longtime bicycle commuter, is one of the bike traffic school's instructors. Lucas said bicyclists are at fault in at least half of all bike vs. vehicle accidents.

The new school, which kicked off its first class in January, is designed to refresh cyclists on the most common mistakes and how to avoid them.

"There are a lot of people endangering themselves because they don't know the law," Lucas said. "A lot of the people who come to the class are surprised by the information, and they come away with concrete illustrations on how to be a better rider."

The class is once a month, either at the county's Emeline Avenue campus or Ecology Action on River Street. More classes will become available as demand increases, Hyland said.

Cyclists over 18 countywide would have the option of taking the \$35 class only once. The money goes toward the cost of the program. A court order to attend the school must be granted.

For information, call 454-7558 or visit www.sctrafficsafety.org.
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