

Getting all the right gear makes for a safe ride

BY SIMON HOAD

BEING safe while cycling has two elements; equipment and behaviour. Before moving into how to act on the road, first we need to talk about what you need on your bike and your body in order to keep you safe. Some might be surprised to learn that the Highway Traffic Act requires four safety items for all bicycles.

A white front light and red rear light or similar coloured reflectors must be present a half-hour before sunset until a half-hour after sunrise. Often missed is an additional 25 centimetre-long by 2.5 centimetre-wide strip of white reflective tape on the front forks and red reflective tape on the rear chain stays. A bell or horn is also essential to alert others to your approach. The last legal requirement is a functioning rear brake. (Single gear 'coaster' bikes do not have external brakes, rather the rider reverse pedals locking the rear wheel to brake.)

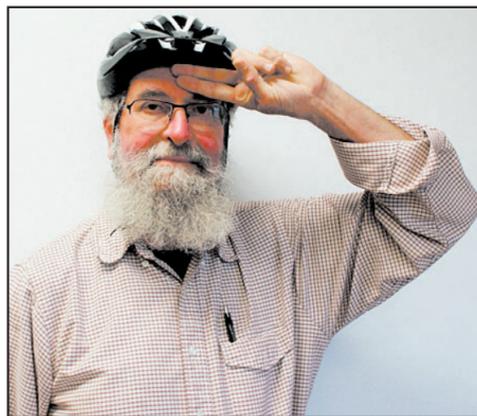
Everyone under age 18 has the additional legal obligation to wear a helmet. The fine is \$65 plus \$15 victim impact surcharge, a hefty amount considering that a decent helmet is half that amount. I argue that every cyclist, even adults with years of experience, needs a helmet. Yes, the breeze flowing through your hair speaks to the romantic in all of us, but it is the hard accident numbers that make the case. The majori-

SHARING THE ROAD

ty of bike accidents are falls, not collisions with cars. It can be simple obstacles that diverts your wheel; the pothole surprise, catching the curb, or slipping on wet leaves, ice, or loose gravel that cause most falls. Without a helmet, the chance of serious injury dramatically increases. In fact, three out of four cycling deaths are from head injuries. Bike helmets can reduce head injuries by up to 85 per cent. If you do take a tumble, the helmet needs to be replaced as it is designed for one-use and will have hidden structural weakness after a fall.

In order for a helmet to properly protect your head, it must fit properly. A simple finger exercise will make the helmet fit safely. First get the basic helmet size right. Adding or removing small pads and adjusting the headband will do the fine tuning for snug comfort. Check for two fingers distance between your eyebrow and the level helmet. Make a 'V' with two fingers on either side of your ear. The two side chin straps should meet just below your ear and be fastened snug enough under your chin for only one finger to fit.

This short list of lights/reflector, bell, functioning rear brake, and a helmet are the bare-bones es-



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Safe Cycling Thunder Bay instructors Lance McKillop, left, and Simon Hoad demonstrate some quick checks for properly fitting a helmet. Lance shows how you should be able to fit your finger between your chin strap and chin while Simon gives the cyclist salute, showing the proper distance your helmet should be from your eyebrows.

sentials. If you cycle in heavy traffic or do a fair amount of group riding, it is a good idea to add a mirror. Just a caution, using a mirror is no substitute for a backward shoulder check, both before and after turning or when changing lanes.

There is a variety of other gear and clothing options you can consider that will not only fit your cycling needs, but also help you avoid injury. Fenders help keep your pants dry and will encourage you to ride on days with variable weather. Stiff-

soled shoes or heavy-duty sandals with a closed toe will protect your feet if you have to stop suddenly. Long laces can catch on the chain so take a moment to tuck them away. To ease the pressure on your palms, consider a pair of cycling gloves. You can also further increase your visibility to motorists by adding a highway safety vest. A carrying rack increases your bike's flexibility and usefulness. Especially since using the handlebars to suspend bags of groceries tempts a tumble.

With some simple gear and a few moments, you can significantly increase your safety on the road when you hop on your bike. But gear alone cannot save your life. Only you and how you behave on your bike can keep you safe, which will be discussed in the next edition of Sharing the Road.

Simon Hoad is an instructor for the Safe Cycling program, which is co-ordinated by EcoSuperior Environmental Programs.



Maurice Fortin

Fortin retires from Mental Health Association

NORTHWEST BUREAU

The executive director of the Thunder Bay branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association is retiring.

Maurice Fortin announced Wednesday that he plans to retire in December after more than three decades with the local branch. Fortin has served the local branch for 31 years, 27 of those as the organization's first and only executive director.

In a statement to reporters, Fortin said he recognizes that much has changed in the field of mental health since he was first hired.

He says there is now a greater willingness for the public to speak out about mental health and more work is being accomplished every day to break down the stigma that exists.

"One in five people in their lifetime will experience mental illness, but you don't have to face it alone," Fortin said. "I want to remind the community that there are dedicated, passionate and caring staff at our branch and the branch should be the first resource people should turn to when trying to overcome any mental health issue, big or small."

Meanwhile, the Thunder Bay branch's board of directors realizes it will have big shoes to fill as it begins the recruitment process to find Fortin's replacement.

"During his tenure, Maurice has been an outstanding leader and advocate for mental health," said board chairman Linda Stewardson. "His expertise and vision have helped shape the organization for its current and future successes."

"Words cannot express our gratitude for Maurice's immeasurable contributions to the organization and the community and I know that he will be greatly missed by the staff, volunteers and local health partners," she added.

CMHA Thunder Bay offers a range of programs and services to support individual recovery and promote mental wellness within families and communities. Programs for youth and adults include support and rehabilitative activities, training workshops, housing support, family education and support, case management, crisis and early psychosis intervention.

Northwest hospitals connect

NORTHWEST BUREAU

Hospitals in Northwestern Ontario are the first in province to be fully connected by a shared regional information system.

The Northwest Health Alliance announced Wednesday that with the connection of Lake of the Woods District Hospital in Kenora, the North West Local Health Integration Network is the first region in the province with a shared regional hospital information system used by all its health care centres.

All 13 hospitals in the Northwest are now connected to the regional hospital information system, further improving access to hospital-based patient information.

Region leads province in sharing patient information

The region's shared hospital information system improves patient care and outcomes by making clinical information about the patient's care available to clinicians in one single view. For patients moving between hospitals in the Northwest, the shared hospital information system enables patient health information to be available, allowing continuity of care to be maintained from one facility to another, the Northwest LHIN says.

The project was directed by the Northwest Health Alliance and implemented jointly by Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre

and St. Joseph's Care Group in collaboration with the Kenora hospital. It is part of a larger initiative, connecting Northern and Eastern Ontario led by eHealth Ontario to integrate electronic health care information across the province on a regional basis.

"Lake of the Woods District Hospital is very pleased to be involved in completing the final link in the vision of a fully integrated health information system among all hospitals in the Northwest Region," hospital CEO Mark Balcaen said in a news release.

"Enhanced electronic access to

clinical information will enable more efficient utilization of clinical resources and ultimately result in better co-ordinated, high quality care for our patients," he said.

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre CEO Andree Robichaud noted that "being able to securely share patient information with other healthcare providers in a patient's circle of care is critical and the shared regional hospital information system makes that possible."

"We are excited to be part of improving patient care through this initiative," she added.

Riverside updates website

NORTHWEST BUREAU

Fort Frances-based Riverside Health Care has a new website (www.riversidehealthcare.ca) that provides better access to hospital and health information for visitors, patients, clients, staff and health care professionals.

Developed with the help of staff at the Fort Frances Times, the website boasts an updated look with enhanced graphics and an intuitive online experience that provides up to date service information.

"The new site was built to ensure ease of access for the public," corporate communications director Nicke Baird said in a news release. "It includes a tab section for each of our sites, a clinical department listing all services available, hours of operation, staff, and much more."

Riverside CEO Allan Katz says the new website is easier to navigate than the previous edition.

"It provides us with the ability to share more information in a timelier manner and we have the option of upgrading it to include social media tools," he said, adding that "as health care continues to change and the need for information continues to grow, it is essential that we share that information with the residents of Rainy River District."

The new website features a "what's new" section, a physician recruitment section, language translation and provides site visitors with the ability to donate online to the Riverside Foundation for Health Care, or apply for employment.

Riverside Health Care operates hospitals in Fort Frances, Emo and Rainy River; the Rainycrest Long-Term Care Home and La Verendrye non-profit supportive housing in Fort Frances.

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