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Pedestrians share roads too

[Local News](#)

By Ryan Saxton
Staff Reporter

Every summer, thousands of vacationers flock to the mid-Atlantic coastline to get away. As road traffic increases, so do the number of pedestrians and bicyclists, and it's not only the ones behind the wheel of an automobile who are responsible for making smart and safe decisions. Last week, the University of Delaware's cooperative Extension partnered with the Town of Fenwick Island for a new community traffic safety program, aimed at reducing injuries and deaths along Delaware roadways.

"A lot of people don't realize that there are things, even as pedestrians, that need to be taken care of," said Merritt Burke of UD's Extension Education and Community Traffic Safety Program.

According to statistics from the Delaware Office of Highway Safety (OHS), the average age range of pedestrians killed statewide is between 20 and 54.

"Believe it or not," said Burke, "it's not just kids who are always getting hurt. The average age of these pedestrians is 47, and a lot of them are tied to drug and alcohol use, especially in New Castle County."

Last year alone, 22 pedestrian deaths were recorded throughout the state, the second highest annual total since 2003. Five were killed while riding a bicycle. Bicycle checkpoints, such as one in Ocean View last week, aim to help educate the public on proper safety practices and bicycle laws.

The top factors in the state's pedestrian deaths are crossing outside the crosswalks, crossing the road at night while wearing dark clothing, walking in the roadway and alcohol use on the part of the pedestrian, which accounts for 47 percent of the fatalities. In 2008, more than half of the pedestrian fatalities occurred on a weekend, and 82 percent of the deaths occurred between 6 p.m. and midnight.

The most important thing local law enforcement can focus on is education. "Our main goal is to promote use of the crosswalk," said Fenwick Island Cpl. Stephen Majewski.

"Just last week, we had an accident involving an automobile and a bicyclist. We're also giving out reflective Walk Smart wristbands for people walking at night."

Last Friday, the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) announced that the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) selected Delaware as the ninth most bicycle friendly state in the country, moving it up from No. 31 last year. Anyone 18 or younger is required to wear a helmet when on a bicycle. Cyclists should also familiarize themselves with proper signals and have proper reflectors visible at all times. Lights on the front and back of bicycles are required when riding at night.

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As many people know, bicyclists are required to ride with the flow of traffic, but state law states that pedestrians are to walk against traffic flow, on the left side of the road, if sidewalks are not available. Pedestrians are urged to walk as far off the edge of the road as possible, too.

"One of our biggest problem with bicyclists and pedestrians is that they are constantly on the wrong sides of the road," said Majewski. "They'll continue this behavior until someone says, 'Enough.' It's one thing to say it, but we need to try to enforce it, too. It's a lot like wearing seat belts. No one wants to get pulled over for not doing the right thing."

When walking at night, pedestrians are also required to carry a flashlight or another reflective item, or to wear reflective clothing. While walking and bicycling under the influence of alcohol and drugs is not only illegal, it will also increase the chances of being struck by an automobile.

Hitchhiking anywhere in the state is also illegal. Traffic signals should be obeyed, and pedestrians should cross the roadways perpendicularly, at marked crosswalks or intersections. If crossing outside of an intersection, pedestrians must yield the right-of-way to motorists.

"We're doing what we can to be proactive, instead of reactive," said Burke. "We don't want to wait until something happens. It's important for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians to learn the laws. People need to follow the rules of the road. We don't want to micromanage vacationers. It's all for safety, and that's hard to argue when you're saving people from themselves."

Fenwick Island was the first coastal town to join the pilot campaign with the University of Delaware's pedestrian safety program. Other local towns will be teaming up, too. Dover, Bethany Beach and Millville are taking further action, as well, retrofitting crosswalks at some intersections with Countdown to Signal signs, in which a timed countdown shows pedestrians the time they have remaining before they need to cross to the other side.

For more tips and statistics concerning bicycle and pedestrian safety, call the Community Traffic Safety Program (CTSP) of Kent/Sussex County at (302) 856-2585, ext. 583, or visit <http://ohs.delaware.gov> online.

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