

SEE. SAFE. SMART: Bicyclists follow the same rules as cars

By Cindy Winters,
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Have you seen the billboard on South Broadway with the SEE.SAFE.SMART. message — or the fliers or posters around town? Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project and the Safe Routes to School Action Team recently launched a new safety campaign to remind people in New Ulm that it's time to SEE people biking and walking, act SAFE, and be SMART. Our goal is to provide education and information on the proper behaviors for people who walk, bike and drive in order to keep everyone safe while they are traveling throughout our community.

Each month for the next 10 months, we'll be including a column here in The Journal to provide more information on a specific safety topic. This month, our focus is on safe bicycling and driving behavior, and how bicyclists follow the same rules as cars.

First, did you know that it was bicyclists that are credited with getting the roads in the United States paved? It's true. Back in 1880, as the sport of bicycling was becoming popular, The League of American Wheelmen (now League of American Bicyclists) was formed to defend their rights. The bicycling group advocated for paved roads so they could further enjoy their sport. Now, let's talk about bicycling safety and some important rules to follow.

1. 10 years or older? It can be safer to ride on the street! People who choose to ride a bicycle either as a form of transportation or recreation should be riding on the street and following the rules of the road if they



are 10 years old or older. BikeMN recommends children under age 10 ride on sidewalks and under the leadership of an adult as they may not have the cognitive development to make the decisions necessary to safely ride in the street. Why ride in the street? Contrary to popular belief and a sense of safety, riding on the street with traffic is more than twice as safe as riding on the sidewalk. That's because drivers are looking at the street for oncoming traffic and not looking at the sidewalks for bicyclists. As a result, more crashes between vehicles and bicycles occur at intersections and driveways.

What's more, when a driver is pulling out of their driveway, someone riding a bicycle can't stop as quickly as someone who is walking on the sidewalk, which also results in more crashes. Finally, there have also been situations where someone walking on a sidewalk has been injured by a reckless person riding their bicycle on the sidewalk instead of the street.

Bicyclists are never required to use sidewalks or side paths. A person lawfully operating a bicycle on a sidewalk or in a crosswalk has all the rights and duties applicable to a pedestrian under the same circumstances, including yielding to pedestrians, walking the bike in a crowded area, providing an audible approach warning, riding at walking speed, and stopping and

yielding at intersections when a pedestrian would.

2. Show respect and follow the rules of the road. Whether driving a car or riding a bicycle, they come with the same responsibility: To respect others when using the same roadway and follow the rules of the road. If you are riding a bicycle, it's important to be vigilant, because it is harder for drivers to see you. Drivers also often don't understand the hazards a bicyclist faces on the roadway. When riding a bicycle, it's important to:

Be predictable. Don't weave in and out of parked cars and maintain a straight line of travel if possible. Avoid roadway hazards and being pinched in the travel lane by riding to the right, but not in the gutter. Give yourself room to avoid potential hazards.

Indicate your intentions so drivers know what to expect. Signal your turns and position yourself in the lane so drivers know your intentions.

Move to the left portion of the lane when making a left turn.

Place yourself more in the center of the lane when going straight through an intersection.

Move to the far right of the lane for a right turn. Yield to oncoming traffic when changing lanes.

3. Avoid dangerous behaviors.

Don't ride on the sidewalks where it is illegal (the downtown section of Minnesota Street) or when old

enough to ride in the street.

Don't ride against traffic.

Don't ignore road signs — be sure to obey stop signs, signals and yield signs.

Don't hug the curb or weave in and out of parked cars.

Don't ride side-by-side with another bicyclist when other road users are present.

4. Pay attention to and follow the bike sharrows. New Ulm now has approximately 8 miles of bike sharrows painted along city streets that connect people who ride their bicycle for transportation and recreation to locations where they travel for work, school, recreation and errands. These bike sharrows serve a couple important purposes:

They inform drivers to expect people biking along these routes so they are more aware and slow down when appropriate.

The placement of the sharrows helps a bicyclist know which direction to ride and where to position themselves on the street when there are parked cars along the street. Riding to the left of the bike sharrow when there are parked cars keeps the rider out of the "door zone" so they aren't injured if someone suddenly opens a car door in their path. When there are no parked cars, a bicyclist should ride to right of the sharrow to give motorists room to legally pass when it is safe to do so.

For more information on bicycling safely and being a good steward of the road, the Bicycle Alliance of Min-



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nesota has developed a valuable resource, "The Minnesota Bicycling Handbook Tips for Riding Legally and Safely," available on their website at www.bikemn.org/handbook. For more information on the SEE.SAFE.SMART. campaign, visit www.heartsbeatback.org/SAFE.

Image and some content excerpted or adapted with permission from the Minnesota Bicycling Handbook, produced by the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota. The handbook is available online at www.bikemn.org/handbook.

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