

Be Safe on Your Bike

Know your Rights and Obligations as a Cyclist

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The bicycle. Invented in 1885 in England; used by over 57 million people in the US at least once a year; a means to get around town or to work to combat the rising cost of fuel; and, a great way to stay healthy and fit as you get older and look for ways to avoid “impact” exercise.

As cycling’s popularity increases, it is important to know NC’s laws relating to bicycles on public roads. Following these laws should not only keep you out of trouble with local law enforcement, but, more importantly, make your ride safer.

- North Carolina legally defines a bicycle as a “vehicle” and therefore, cyclists have all of the rights and responsibilities that are applicable to a motor vehicle.
- Bicycle helmets –Bicyclists and bicycle passengers under the age of 16 must wear approved protective safety helmets when they are riding on public roads, bike paths or other public rights-of-way
- Bicycle lights – From sunset to sunrise, every bike is required to be equipped with



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a lighted lamp on the front that is visible from at least 300' and a rear red reflex mirror or lamp visible from at least 200'.

- Ride on the right – When on a road, bicyclists must ride in the same direction as traffic. A cyclist must travel in the right-hand lane and should ride as close as practicable to the right-hand edge of the highway. Obviously, cyclists can move away from the right-edge to avoid obstructions.
- Signs and signals – An easy one. At all times, cyclists are required to obey all traffic signs and signals just like motor vehicles. This means come to a complete stop at a stop sign or at a red light.
- Turn signals – Cyclists must signal they are turning/stopping by using electrical, mechanical or manual signals. Most cyclists use arm/hand signals to accomplish this, but remember that you should do it at least 100 feet before the turn/stop.
- Reporting a crash – If you are in a bike accident that results in death or injury or property damage of \$1,000 or more, this must be reported to local law enforcement. Do this even if no other motor vehicle is involved. So, if you're riding and an unchained dog takes off after you and causes an accident, make sure you contact local law enforcement as many cities and counties have leash laws.
- With cycling accidents, the law of negligence applies. This means, that if you are in a bike accident with a motor vehicle, your conduct will be analyzed just like the other driver. North Carolina's negligence law has a component called contributory negligence. So, if you are injured and your own negligence contributes to the accident, you may not be able to recover.
- Also, if you are riding your bike on a regular basis, you should contact your

insurance agent to determine if your automobile insurance would cover you for an accident involving another motor vehicle.

As cycling becomes even more popular, we need to follow the rules so that non-cyclists don't see us as a nuisance or a hazard. But if an accident does happen, remember what your rights and obligations are as a cyclist and, if you follow those, the law should be on your side.



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