



[The Informed Cyclist: Road Hazards, Safety Gear and Proper Traffic Etiquette](#)

by [John Demas](#) on 02/06/09 at 11:43 am

As reported earlier this year in The Sacramento Bee, even experienced cyclists can fall victim to [road accidents](#). One local resident broke his leg after trying to ride his bike over light-rail tracks. <http://www.sacbee.com/ourregion/story/1543509.html>

As he sought to recover from his injury, the cyclist tried to learn why he lost full control of his bike. During his investigation, he learned that train rails are regularly oiled to minimize train noise and prevent undue rail wear.

In order to avoid this type of accident, especially if it has recently rained, cyclists are urged to walk their bikes across rails or unusually busy street intersections. Check to see if your city has provided adequate crosswalks before beginning your journey.

We hope you'll review the following general road hazards, important safety precautions and basic tips on riding etiquette so you can maximize your cycling safety.

Road Hazards for Cyclists

In general, cyclists should avoid riding around construction sites or when streets are unusually slippery, wet or icy. Care should also be taken to only ride in areas with adequate road signs, traffic lights and smooth road surfaces. High-traffic zones are never recommended for cyclists, nor are poorly lit parts of town.

Important Safety Suggestions

Experienced cyclists know that they should always wear a properly fitting helmet, good shoes for gripping the pedals and bright clothing to increase their visibility to car drivers. Other riders recommend applying plenty of reflective tape to your bike for safer night riding, in addition to purchasing front and rear lights.

Proper bicycle maintenance is equally important and should include keeping the proper tire pressure and making sure the bike seat is kept at its optimal level.

Although they don't look very stylish, some children and amateur cyclists like to wear protective knee and elbow pads. Special riding gloves can be useful for gripping the brake handles and sunglasses can protect your eyes from harmful irritants. Glasses can also help you recognize the correct colors of upcoming traffic lights.

Both professional and amateur riders should always carry a bike pump and at least one spare inner tube in case they have a flat tire. Other essentials include a first-aid kit, a flashlight for nighttime repairs and a carefully mounted bell or horn to signal an approaching car that just can't see you.

Bicycle safety also involves avoiding dangerous riding habits. You should never wear earplugs or headphones because they're likely to keep you from hearing an approaching vehicle. Furthermore, you should never allow anyone to ride on the front or rear of your bike.

Finally, be sure you know how to work the gears and brakes on any new or borrowed bike before leaving for your destination.

Basic Bike Riding Etiquette: Just Follow the Rules

As children, many of us foolishly disregarded stop signs, traffic lights and other rules of the road. While we may have lived to tell our tales, it's still both illegal and unwise to keep tempting fate with such behaviors. Furthermore, many jurisdictions issue traffic citations as readily to bicycle riders as they do to automobile drivers.

Hopefully, paying close attention to weather and surface road conditions, wearing appropriate safety gear and abiding by all pertinent traffic laws will help you avoid any future bicycle accidents.