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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NTSB: Newcomers to Motorcycle Safety

The National Transportation Safety Board has issued some recommendations to the federal government as well as some selected states in an effort to address the rising crash numbers of motorcycles.

The NTSB has engaged motorcycle safety; after only forty years of silence.

The NTSB opened its doors on April 1, 1967. Although independent, it relied on the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) for funding and administrative support. In 1975, under the Independent Safety Board Act, all organizational ties to DOT were severed. The NTSB is not part of DOT, or affiliated with any of its agencies.

The NTSB has investigated 124,000 aviation crashes, 10,000 surface transportation crashes (including rail, pipeline and mass transit) and, get ready for this, a whopping six motorcycle crashes. That's a half dozen motorcycle investigations over the past 40 years or just .15 motorcycle crashes a year to put it in government statistic speak.

As the self described "premier safety agency" one would think that they would have a concrete set of instruction when it comes to issuing safety recommendations and they do, for every type of tragic accident except motorcycles. When issuing safety recommendations for most modes of transportation the NTSB relies on it's field investigators, PhD researchers and professional staff to carefully gather information and decipher what is fact from fiction. However, for this set of recommendations the NTSB relied on the tired, antiquated, already existing research on motorcycle safety, which isn't much.

At the September 11, 2007 board meeting they admitted that they had come to the recommendations in a way that was outside of normal operating procedures. Motorcyclists should be deeply disturbed by this lack of consideration and attention. We at the MRF believe that motorcyclists deserve as much consideration as planes, trains, cars and pipelines.

It is fact, the only new findings this lengthy but flimsy set of recommendations are based on were developed after a two day NTSB organized symposium just one year ago and the findings from investigating a paltry six crashes over the past forty years.

One curious omission in the recommendations was in the area of education. There wasn't even as much as a whisper of education or training, which was a very big part of the two day super symposium last fall. One of the cornerstones of bettering anything is education. To leave out those two important components shows the true depth of these recommendations from the NTSB members and researchers on this matter. So are we to believe that driver's education should be scrapped? What about all the teenagers waiting to drive or the new immigrant who doesn't know the first thing about the rules of the road?

One almost highpoint was when the National Agenda for Motorcycle Safety and it's implementation guide were brought up. These documents have been the best comprehensive guide on motorcycle safety and perhaps the first of its kind to be endorsed by NHTSA, MSF, MRF, AMA and a host of others. The NTSB ordered NHTSA to "re-organize the priorities" in the original document. This is an exercise akin to moving the deck chairs around on the Titanic as she was sinking. NHTSA already gave this their best shot. They signed off on NAMS seven years ago. Why would NHTSA want to re-do a product that they have been standing behind for almost a decade?

In stark contrast to this issue, the NTSB has school bus safety improvements listed on their "most wanted" (read: most needed) list. To date, six states have laws requiring school buses to have safety belts but none have laws requiring them to be worn. Shouldn't child safety be paramount to adult safety? Seems not, according to the NTSB. There isn't even a mention of motorcycle on the "most wanted" list, but you can bet there will be now. Why give so much attention to an issue that wasn't even on the "most wanted" list and operate in a backwards fashion? In this case it is more than likely they rushed into motorcycle safety to cover their proverbial butts. The fact is, it just does not reflect well politically or financially for the premier safety agency - mandated by Congress to investigate motorcycles (as they are airplanes) or not - to sit idly by while motorcycle crashes increase.

The disappointing part is that most of the government agencies and the at-large motorcycle community had been in agreement working together on motorcycle safety. There was a general consensus with the Congress and the Administration that we would work on crash avoidance not injury reduction. The fact is that fatalities do need to slow down and calling for helmet laws just is not the silver bullet the NTSB believes it to be. The MRF will always focus on crash avoidance before injury reduction.

Most of the other government agencies in Washington DC, the MRF, AMA and many others have come to the realization that crash avoidance is always better than safer crashing. Everyone should all at least agree that avoiding a crash altogether is the best for all involved parties.

The NTSB had an opportunity to engage the motorcycle community in a positive way and build on the work that has already happened. They chose to ignore the history, states rights and any and all motorcycle education possibilities.

For the record the MRF has the utmost respect for the NTSB as an

institution and it's staff when it comes to what they do best, planes, trains, bridge and tunnel collapses and mass transit tragedies. However, they are the very last federal safety agency to engage motorcycle safety and as with most late comers, are just trying to catch up and bring too little, too late. The MRF does not doubt the sincerity of the NTSB and it's desire to avoid tragedy and save life. However, it may be best to leave motorcycle safety to those who have a vested interest for the past 80 years; the motorcyclists of America.

The NTSB also pointed out the United States of America is an anomaly when compared to rest of world concerning universal helmet laws. This may be the one thing they got right. The USA is one of, if not the only, country in the developed world with out a universal helmet law. What NTSB fails to recognize is - that is a symbol of so many other things where we are alone in the world. Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness come to mind as well as freedom of speech, religion, and press. Maybe its alright to be the only country that does things its own way, after all its what this country was founded on and it is what has gotten us through the past few hundred years just fine.

The NTSB will be sending their hired gun lobbyists and professional staff to the states that were mentioned in the recommendations. Unlike NHTSA, the NTSB is not subject to a lobby ban, meaning they can lobby your state as they wish for what they wish, all the while using taxpayer money. Make your governors and governor highway safety representatives aware of this. Let them also know how the NTSB reached it's recommendations with little or no input from the motorcycle community. Let them know that your state doesn't need to take half baked advice from an agency in Washington DC. This is just another incident of bureaucrats in Washington DC trying to ram regulation down the throats of all 50 states. More of the same from a big government agency in a big government town. Just try to chew slowly.

The MRF will continue to dialogue with the NTSB just as it does with all Federal Agencies that effect motorcycling.

These recommendations do not carry the weight of law. The NTSB has no regulatory or enforcement capabilities. You can read the recommendations, view the board meeting and more at:

<http://www.nts.gov/events/Boardmeeting.htm>

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Send in your nominations and donations for the MRF's Young Activist Scholarship fund today. For complete details, visit

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Sign up today for the MRF's new roadside assistance program by visiting <http://www.mrf.org/mrfroadside.php> The program is available to MRF members and non-MRF members.

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The MRF proudly claims state motorcyclists' rights organizations and the very founders of the American riders' rights movement among its leading members. The MRF is involved in federal and state legislation and regulations, motorcycling safety education, training, and public awareness. The MRF provides members and state motorcyclists' rights organizations with direction and information, and sponsors annual regional and national educational seminars for motorcyclists rights activists, as well as publishing a bi-monthly newsletter, THE MRF REPORTS.

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