

Top 5 Cycling Situations to Avoid

According to a 2013 study in Portland, OR, around 70-75% of cyclist feel “very” or “extremely” concerned about their safety at some point during their usual bike rides. A majority of this concern is due to car traffic, which can be intimidating and dangerous for bicycles. However, with some preparation, you can make sure you are ready to tackle whatever problems arise on your next ride.

Below are the top five crash situations cyclists face, as well as techniques to make sure they never happen to you.

1) Sudden Driveways

Problem: Many winding streets and urban/suburban neighborhoods feature driveways that are hard to see. In order for cars to see as they emerge from them, they must pull outward until their driver window is clear of obstructions. This often means unexpectedly pulling up over a sidewalk or into a bike lane, causing danger for a lot of cyclists who are unaware of these driveways until its too late.

Safety Techniques:

¥ **Ride defensively.** Especially if you are unfamiliar with an area (but even if you are) it is always possible to be caught unawares by a hidden drive. Ride slowly enough to stop suddenly if necessary, and be sure to remain aware of your surrounding at all times.

¥ **Ride a little further to the left.** Most cyclists are terrifying of inching any further into the car lane than they need to be. However, when in doubt, it is important to remember that cyclists have all the same rights and laws as cars when on the road. Move a bit further into the car lane if necessary to give yourself and other unexpected drivers a better line of sight and more time to prevent a potential crash.

2) Wrong Way Riding

Problem: Every now and then, you come across a difficult stretch of road that makes you feel unsafe or too compact. When riding here, it may be your instinct to pop over to the other side of the road and ride against the flow of traffic, allowing you to see which cars are coming. However, because most vehicle drivers do not expect cyclists on this side of the road, you are at risk for more unexpected, dangerous, high-speed crashes.

Safety Techniques:

¥ **Only ride with the flow of traffic.** Regardless of how much safer it may make you feel, *never* ride against the flow of traffic. As mentioned above, it is one of the most dangerous situations you can be in as a cyclist, putting you at risk for a number of high-speed crash situations. More importantly, it is also *illegal* and could lead to you getting a nasty fine.

¥ **Plan your route before riding.** Do your best to plan ahead and avoid problem areas like these before setting out. When in doubt, avoid any street or area that makes you feel unsafe, even if it means a longer route.

3) Stopping Zones

Problem: Areas with stoplights or four-way stops are designed to help regulate traffic in a way that is safe for cars. However, these areas can prove trouble for cyclists, who are harder for drivers to notice than another car. This can lead to law-breakers making life difficult should they choose to drive into your path when it isn't their right of way.

Safety Techniques:

¥ **Ride slow in and around intersections.** This doesn't mean riding so slow that you hog up traffic, which can put you at risk for other problems. This only means to approach stopping zones cautiously and be aware when you're crossing.

¥ **Communicate noticeably and often with other drivers.** This can mean using waves, verbal cues, cycling signals, or even just making eye contact with other drivers. Help them to be aware of you to ensure they are cautious as well.

4) Blind Spots

Problem: The back-right side of most cars is called a blind spot for a reason. Due to the position of the driver, this area of their vehicle is the hardest to keep watch of and the most likely to cause problems on the road. However, this problem is only amplified for cyclists, who are already much smaller and harder to notice than cars. When making any right turn, from a stop light to a side street, you always run the risk of falling into blind spot territory, which can lead to some unexpected maneuvers and crashes.

Safety Techniques:

¥ **Try your best to stay out of car's blind spots.** For instance, when turning right, stay directly behind the vehicle in front of you instead of inching out to the right. This keeps

you in sight of the immediate next driver as well as other drivers that can help give you room when you turn.

¥ **Stay as alert as possible when riding.** Even if this means leaving your earbuds at home, it is more important to stay aware of what's around you and stay in-tune to what other drivers are seeing and doing. This can help you to better gauge in the moment which riding situations are/aren't safe.

5) Getting Hit From Behind

Problem: Most cyclists cite getting hit from behind as one of their greatest crash fears on the road. While this isn't as common of a crash as you think, it can definitely happen, especially at night. Whether a car approaches too fast from behind, or a car simply doesn't notice you're there due to an obstructed view or lack of lighting, this situation can definitely be a scary one.

Safety Techniques:

¥ **Wear bright and/or reflective clothes.** Bright, neon clothes during the day and reflective clothes at night give you the best chance of standing out and being seen, regardless of your environment.

¥ **Use headlights, back lights, and reflectors.** The more your bike can create its own light, the more likely you are to be noticed and avoided by other cars on the road. These also help you to better see at night and keep you from running into unexpected obstacles.

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