

## Cycles can run lights, if need be

Posted: Tuesday, Jun 06, 2006 - 11:43:31 pm PDT

By CHRISTI WILHELM

Staff writer

### Motorcyclists, under new law, can go ahead and go if light just won't change

COEUR d'ALENE -- Tim Herzog said he's sat through many red lights on his motorcycle, until finally looking both ways and just "going."

"It's something we've (motorcyclists) been doing all these years," the Post Falls resident said.

A new law that takes effect July 1 will let them do it legally.

According to Senate Bill 1367 sponsored by Sen. Mike Jorgenson, R-Hayden, motorcyclists can proceed through a red light if the signal doesn't change to green after one complete cycle.

Motorcyclists have been plagued for years with traffic signals that don't recognize a motorcycle at traffic stops because of their size, said Herzog, ABATE state deputy coordinator and state legislative chairman.

ABATE, American Bikers Aiming Toward Education, is a motorcycle rights organization. It has six chapters statewide.

Herzog added that the problem exists primarily in low traffic situations when there isn't another vehicle to trigger electro magnetic sensors, which are located underground at most intersections.

Tim Turrell, Idaho Transportation Department traffic engineer, said there are plans to switch underground sensors to cameras at all intersections.

U.S. 95 and Honeysuckle Avenue are the only two roads in the area that have video detection, not underground sensors.

He also said the six- by six-foot underground loops sense mass and if motorcycles have a lot of plastic parts, they sometimes won't be detected in the first cycle.

"Sometimes people perceive that it (the sensor) didn't trip ... when it did, and drive through too soon," he said.

Though sensors can be adjusted, they can be made too sensitive, which will cause the sensors to trip when vehicles aren't present, he added.

Turrell also said that if motorcycles will line up in the center of the lane, detection is very accurate.

Herzog hopes to start a motorcycle awareness class in conjunction with Post Falls driver education courses. He said he met with ITD about 13 years ago concerning underground sensors. When nothing at the time could be done, some cyclists bought magnets to trip sensors.

Whether they work has not been determined.

Jorgenson said the bill will add to safety.

Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, disagrees.

Though not anti-motorcycle, Keough believes a better way is to fix the lights, not to give one group of drivers special privileges when all drivers -- no

matter the vehicle type -- can turn right on red unless otherwise posted.

The only drawback would be a "little time inconvenience" and a few-block detour, she said.

"I envision difficulties for law enforcement," she said. "Drivers can say the light didn't change and 'I'm allowed to go through it.'"

Rick Ohnsman, ISP agency information officer, said the new law will be as safe as the rider makes it.

"If they think it gives them carte blanche (to not stop at lights), then it could be a problem," he said. "Once you pull away from that stop light, you now have put yourself at the mercy of that other driver.

"You better be right."

Idaho is one of five states in the country that has passed the law. The others are Minnesota, Tennessee, Arkansas and Wisconsin.

Ohnsman said increasing gas prices could mean more motorcycle, scooter and two-wheel traffic and a possible increase in accidents.

While Herzog knows of no accident increase, he does acknowledge that more first-time riders -- older adults and younger kids -- are now buying and riding cycles, which can be used about six months a year.

According the ITD, motorcycle registration increased 12.1 percent from 2003 to 2004.

Ohnsman said that in 2004, there were 508 collisions involving motorcycles statewide. Of those, 24 were fatalities, 145 were serious, 216 drivers had visible injuries and 110 had possible injuries.

Of the 24 fatalities, 65 percent were 35 years and older.

In the 508 collisions, 42.6 percent were wearing helmets.

Idaho's helmet law requires persons under to 18 to wear them. For drivers over that age, wearing a helmet is optional.

"I hope they (motorcycle drivers) use better judgment with stop lights than they're using with helmets," Ohnsman said.

From CDA Press June 6, 2006