

# Health and Safety for Pool Bike Users

## Will health and safety concerns be a barrier to the scheme?

Hopefully you will receive a warm response to your plans to implement a pool bike scheme, and other members of your organisation will be fully supportive. You may also encounter a few concerns and queries along the way however, whether it be regarding health and safety issues in general, or more specific concerns from potential users of the scheme, such as wariness about riding in traffic. All of the potential concerns you may encounter can be solved by developing appropriate systems and utilising the evidence available concerning cycle safety. This document should assist you in doing both.

## How will the pool bikes fit into our existing health and safety policy?

Strictly speaking, your pool bikes will simply be an additional piece of equipment provided for use by employees, in the same way that kettles, photo-copiers and pool cars are provided. Your health and safety procedures and policies will stipulate that all equipment provided for staff use must be maintained to a standard, and that appropriate instructions for use are provided. Therefore, by ensuring that your pool bike process includes due attention to maintenance (see the Pool Bike Maintenance Guide) and that users are provided with relevant information on joining the scheme, you should satisfy the legal requirements for your organisation.

## Is it safe and legal to cycle without a cycle helmet?

There is currently no legal requirement for adults in the UK to wear a helmet when cycling, but it is of course advisable to provide a cycle helmet with every bike in order to provide a choice for the bike user. Some schemes may choose to make helmet use compulsory, but this raises the question of whether it is reasonable or enforceable for an organisation to demand a greater level of stringency than the law dictates. Compulsory helmet wearing may act as a barrier to

those who do not wish to wear one



(many regular cyclists choose not to use a helmet for number of reasons, including evidence which suggests that drivers leave a wider space when passing cyclists riding without a helmet). An insistence on helmet use also serves to perpetuate the impression that cycling is inherently dangerous.



### Is it safe and legal to ride without high visibility clothing?

There is currently no legal requirement in the UK to wear high visibility clothing when cycling. You may wish to provide high visibility vests for those who wish to use them, however. These will be useful when riding at night, as the reflective strips are highly visible in car headlights. During the day, a fluorescent colour may serve to make a rider more noticeable, but whether cycling at night or during the day, high visibility clothing is a poor substitute for good cycling skills when it comes to making sure cyclists are seen (see below).

### Is it legal to ride without lights?

It is illegal in the UK to cycle at night without a front (white) light and a rear (red) light. The law has recently changed to permit cyclists to use an intermittent or flashing rear light, which some cyclists feel makes them more visible. It is legal to ride without lights during the day, but all bikes must be fitted with a rear reflector and reflective strips on the back of each pedal (these should be fitted as standard). Since many lights are easy to remove (and therefore steal) it is advisable for lights to be provided, but stored until use is needed at night.

### Is it legal to ride without a bell?

There is now a legal requirement in the UK for all bikes to be fitted with a bell when they are sold, although there is no requirement for a bike to have a bell in order for it to be ridden. It is useful to have a bell, especially for use on 'shared use' paths, where cyclists may encounter pedestrians and need to make their presence known. Bicycle bells should be used in a considerate way - one or two gentle rings as the rider approaches pedestrians should be enough to make other path users aware that the cyclist would like to pass, and use of a bell should not be an alternative to other forms of considerate behaviour, such as slowing down and allowing enough passing space.

### Is cycling a dangerous activity?

There are of course risks with cycling, as with any other activity, so when designing your pool bike scheme and considering appropriate levels of risk management, it is important to understand the evidence available regarding cycle safety, and the relatively low risks involved. A number of commonly held misconception exist regarding cycling, namely that it is a dangerous activity, that cyclists have a high rate of injury and fatality on the roads, and in particular that cycling is more dangerous than driving.

The greatest deterrent to cycle use is fear of road danger<sup>1,2</sup>, even though cycle casualties have been falling rapidly in recent years<sup>3</sup>. There is clear evidence that cycle safety improves as cycle use increases<sup>4</sup>, i.e. cycling gets safer the more people do it. The Government and British Medical Association both note that health benefits of cycling far outweigh the risks involved, by a factor of 20:1 according to one estimate<sup>5</sup>.

## What is the biggest factor in safety when cycling?

Evidence shows that (contrary to common perception) only a tiny proportion of cycling collisions involve a cyclist being hit by a driver from behind. This is largely because in general, cyclists are clearly visible to drivers approaching from behind. This fact underlies the main determinant of a cyclist's safety; visibility. As discussed above, the key to making sure you are visible to other road users when cycling is *not reflective clothing but in fact road positioning and general cycling skills*. Good cycling practice and techniques enable a rider to position themselves at all times so that other road users can not only see them, but are aware of their intentions. Adopting an appropriate position in the road can be as clear a signal of intention as using a physical arm signal for instance, and can ensure that sufficient space is left



by passing drivers. You may like to provide a brief guide to good road positioning with your scheme induction pack, or to recommend (or provide for loan) the book *Cycle Craft* (by John Franklin) which gives a very thorough introduction.

Alternatively, you could provide the option of a one-to-one cycle lesson through a provider such as Cycle Training Wales. Even some quite experienced cyclists may benefit from tuition on advance riding techniques,

<sup>1</sup> **Automobile Association, 1992** Cycling motorists and how to encourage them.

<sup>2</sup> **Department for Transport, 2003** Attitudes to walking and cycling.

<sup>3</sup> There was a 37% reduction in cycle casualties between 1993 and 2002. Cycle use increased marginally over this period. Sources: **Department for Transport, 2002** Road Casualties Great Britain and **Transport Statistics Great Britain, 2002**.

<sup>4</sup> **Jacobsen P, 2003** Safety in numbers: more walkers and bicyclists, safer walking and cycling.

<sup>5</sup> **Hillman M, 1992** Cycling and the promotion of health. PTRC 20th Summer Annual Meeting, Proceedings of Seminar B, pp 25-36.

and may be able to increase their confidence, efficiency and safety on the road by improving their positioning. More information on training is given in the *Cycle Training Guide*.

## Should we make training compulsory?

Experience shows that making cycle training compulsory can act as a substantial barrier to people starting to use pool bikes. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case:

- Practical barriers - it may take time to arrange training, or people may feel they are too busy to attend
- People who are already confident cyclists may feel that it is unreasonable to ask them to attend training
- Those who are new or returning to cycling may be put off by the insistence that training is necessary as they may feel this suggests that cycling is dangerous
- Some people only wish to use the bikes on traffic free routes close to the office, and so training in how to ride on the road would be unnecessary initially.

Due to the likelihood that people may be deterred by one or more of these barriers, it is advisable to offer training, but not to make it compulsory. By offering a range of training (from beginner lessons to advanced cycling in traffic) and by emphasising the benefits to be gained, training provision can greatly enhance your scheme rather than acting as a detriment to its success (see the *Cycle Training Guide* for more information).

## Is it compulsory for cyclists to use cycle lanes?

There is currently no legal obligation for cyclists to use cycle lanes and other specialised provision where these are present. Common types of on-road provision for cyclists include cycle lanes adjacent to the carriageway, and advance stop lines at traffic lights. The priority for cyclists should always be adopting the most visible and appropriate position in the road as discussed above, and where this coincides with the provision of a cycle lane, it may be convenient for the lane to be used. In many cases however, the cycle lane or feeder lane (into an advance stop box for example) may actually put the cyclist in a sub-optimal or even dangerous position. Examples include where use of a cycle lane would position a cyclist too close to parked cars with the risk of being knocked off if a door opens. In these instances the cyclist should adopt the most appropriate position in the road, irrespective of cycle lane provision.

## Useful Contacts

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/default.asp?slD=1089651611859> - general information on the benefits of Cycling and where to get started

The CTC website features a number of useful articles on the benefits of cycling, as well as evidence based on traffic incident statistics: <http://www.ctc.org.uk>

Highway code for cyclists:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Highwaycode/DG\\_069837](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Highwaycode/DG_069837)

Tips on risk management: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/principlespoints.htm>

If you would like to discuss the information provided here, or any other element of setting up an active travel or pool bike scheme, you can contact:

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The Active Travel Workplace Toolkit has been developed by Sustrans in partnership with the Sports Council for Wales.



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