

Helmets still optional

By Mike Welbel

Nine of 10 Nebraskans involved in fatal motorcycle accidents do not wear helmets, according to the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety.

We'd like to have every cyclist wearing helmets, said Fred Zwonechek, the office's administrator.

Nebraska is one of seven states without helmet laws for motorcyclists. Washington, Iowa, Illinois, Connecticut, Colorado and California are the others.

In the last 10 years two helmet laws passed in Nebraska, but were found to be unconstitutional, Zwonechek said.

In 1967, the first helmet law passed in Nebraska, but it provided no penalty if the law was broken. Then, in 1971 and 1975, LB1041 and LB328 respectively were passed. The bills added a penalty to the helmet law, but later were found to be unconstitutional because they took constitutional rights away from people, Zwonechek said.

The last bill concerning motorcycle helmets was LB961, proposed in 1980.

The bill died in committee shortly after its introduction by state Sen. David Landis of Lincoln.

Landis said many motorcycle groups oppose helmet laws.

"They believe that it should be an individual right," he said.

Dan Cross of the Lincoln Tour Stars, a new Lincoln motorcycle club, said helmet laws are a touchy subject.

"Everybody in our group wears helmets at their own decision," Cross said. This opposes another Lincoln club's philosophy, he said. Members of A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments did not wear helmets in their April 14 parade, Cross said.

John Bonebright of ABATE said the group does not oppose helmets and many ABATE members wear them.

"We want people wearing helmets

through education, not because of governmental regulations," Bonebright said. "Compare the same reasoning to a 17-year-old who can get a hunting license if he takes a gun safety course. If they didn't have the course, everyone would be wearing bullet-proof vests."

If a helmet law passed, Bonebright said, people would be "riding around in swimsuits and helmets, still making the same dangerous mistakes in traffic because of their lack of education."

People also would buy cheap helmets, Bonebright said.

"We've got a saying, if you have a \$10 head, wear a \$10 helmet," he said.

Landis said it comes down to one question: "Is safety a personal choice?"

"I'd wear one only in a hailstorm," said Aldis Augstums, owner of Augstums Printing, 1621 S. 17th St.

"I'm not opposed to wearing helmets," he said, "but I believe they give a false sense of security."

With a helmet on, he said, "all you hear is the click of your engine. I feel safer without one."

State Sen. Shirley Marsh said she also dislikes the hearing problems that helmets cause.

"There should be a different kind of design for helmets," she said.

As far as education is concerned, Marsh said not everyone learns from education.

Marsh introduced LB403 in the last legislative session. The resolution calls for a study of safety factors, including the need for a mandatory motorcycle helmet law. The resolution was referred to the public works committee, chaired by Sen. Loran Schmit of Belwood. Dave Fischer, Sen. Schmit's legal counsel, said the committee probably will discuss the issues in August or September.

Starry night at Behlen

Tonight will be public night at Behlen Observatory, from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. This open house will feature a quarter moon sky. Weather permitting, it will be ideal for viewing the globular clusters with their thousands of stars and planets.

Behlen Observatory is at the University of Nebraska field laboratory on Avenue C between Third and Fourth streets. The field lab is southeast of Mead and can be reached via Highways 77 and 63 from Lincoln. Contact the department of physics and astronomy at 472-2770 for more information.



Craig Andresen/Daily Nebraskan

Blew 'em away

Darren Johnson, a member of Delta Sigma Phi fraternity blows on the flugelhorn. Johnson, J.E. Sanders, T.K. Olson, Terry Olson and Rick Cowling won Thursday night's Greek Talent Show competition, held in the Nebraska Union. The group won with their rendition of Chuck Mangione's "Feels So Good."

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