

Safe Cycling in Stillwater

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1 Bicycle Laws and Safe Riding Habits

Motorists are sometimes unaware of the rights that cyclists have on the road but cyclists themselves are often guilty of unknowingly breaking the law or of practicing habits which are unsafe for them and motorists. For example, did you know that a bicycle is considered a vehicle with all the right and responsibilities of any other vehicle on the road?

This article attempts to give basic guidelines for safe riding as well as what is and what is not legally acceptable. Lets work prevent ourselves from becoming yet another casualty statistic.

Visibility

It cannot be said enough times: visibility is key to survival. Everyone has seen (or perhaps barely seen) the lone cyclist or pedestrian, wearing dark clothing, at a dark intersection, cutting across illegally and we think to ourselves "what a dummy!" However, many otherwise well-intentioned cyclists are guilty of almost the same thing. It is not only *state law* to wear lights at night, but it makes a lot of sense too. Batteries are cheap to replace and the better-made lights will last for months with a single pair. Do yourself a favor and increase your own visibility with a head and tail light.

Another common fault in cyclists is the failure to use hand signals. These are critical to preventing vehicles from passing you when you are making a left turn, for example, and help show motorists your intentions. They are also required by law.

- Head and tail lights
- Use hand signals

Awareness

This is also key to survival as a cyclist. Never trust everyone else to look after you. Never, ever think that a car will just suddenly give you the right of way if you cut across the road. Just like any other vehicle, look all around you when crossing, turning, or changing lanes. One of the best things you can get for your bicycle is a rear-view mirror. It not only gives you peace of mind, it informs you (by the vehicle's body language) whether or not the driver has seen you.

- Rearview mirror

Location

A lot of cyclists believe that they are safer on the sidewalk. This is far from true and in fact is sometimes illegal (especially in business districts). A vehicle turning into a side street is far less likely to see you, as is a vehicle coming out of a side street. Vehicles turning right at a crosswalk are notoriously blind as well. The more you observe, the more you begin realize that being on the sidewalk actually decreases your visibility to motorists. A cyclist may feel more

vulnerable on the road but generally that is the safest place to be: moving with the flow of traffic in a location that the other vehicles are expecting to see traffic move.

Now there are certainly exceptions and if there is a designated bike path then that is of course the best place to be, by design. Or if you are a very slow rider (closer to pedestrian speed) then it may be less annoying for motorists and safer for you to ride on the sidewalk, but be sure to look all around (even behind you) when coming to a where a side-road crosses the sidewalk, as that is where most accidents occur. More cyclists are afraid of being hit on the road and are not sufficiently afraid of being hit on the sidewalk when in fact, according to a study by Watchel and Lewiston:—

“Bicycling against traffic increases accident risk by 360%, bicycling on the sidewalk increases accident risk by 180%, and bicycling the wrong way on the sidewalk increases accident risk by 430%.”

Most experienced cyclists will agree that riding as a vehicle on the road, going the same direction as the rest of traffic, is the safest place to be. Similar studies to the one above also claim that only 5% of cycling accidents are from being hit from behind. Nevertheless, if you are paranoid like me then it is a really good investment to get a rear-view mirror.

When riding on the road, a cyclist is required to ride as far to the right-hand side as is *safe*. If there is glass or debris then it is not safe, but be sure the vehicles behind you know you are avoiding obstacles, which means: ride predictably. Additionally, for roads with no shoulder and no safe passing point for cars, take control of the lane by riding closer to the center. Make it obvious that the vehicle behind you cannot yet safely pass, then when it is safe, be courteous—move over and wave them on. Motorists will appreciate the courtesy and you will both be safer.

If there are two lanes of traffic going in the same direction and no shoulder, it is sometimes safer to completely control the right lane so two cars do not try to squeeze through side by side and thereby endangering themselves and you. A three-foot passing distance is the law.

- Ride on the road instead of the sidewalk

Control

Not only should you control the road (by being in command of the situation), but you should also be in control of your bike. Make a hand signal to turn and then turn using both hands—it is not required that you signal through the entire turn and in fact this is *dangerous* as you can easily hit a rock or bump and fall in the middle of the road. If there is a vehicle is turning behind you it could be disastrous.

When braking at a stop sign, make a stopping signal but then put both hands on the handlebars to brake: you will save your rear brake-pad from excessive wear and have more control. Keep in mind that you merely want to make other vehicles aware of your intention, not to go through the motions for their sake alone. Once others are aware, get back to maximum control over your bicycle.

- Control with both hands as much as possible

Obey the law

It is no wonder that some motorists hate cyclists. The law says that cyclists are granted all of the rights and *responsibilities* of other vehicles on the road. This means that the cyclist should

stop at red lights. The cyclist should not hop from sidewalk to road and back again to avoid traffic, and certainly should not pass stopped traffic. Drivers lose all respect for a cyclist that flaunts the law. You will still have the occasional driver that does not seem to realize you are a legal vehicle but in general motorists will respect you a lot more and be able to predict your moves better if you act as a vehicle should and obey the laws. This also increases your visibility dramatically and keeps you safer.

- Follow all laws of vehicles

Conclusion

Enjoy yourself. Cycling is meant to be fun and healthy and it can be done very safely if certain guidelines are followed. Be considerate, visible, predictable, and obey all traffic laws as if you were a vehicle. Hopefully both motorists and cyclists can respect each other and share the road a bit better.

2 Oklahoma Relevant Cycling Laws

From the Oklahoma Statutes.

§47-1-104. **Bicycle, electric-assisted bicycle, and motorized bicycle.**

- A. A bicycle is a device upon which any person or persons may ride, propelled solely by human power through a belt, chain, or gears, and having two or more wheels, excluding mopeds.
- D. As used in this title, the term "bicycle" shall include tricycles, quadcycles, or similar human-powered devices, electric-assisted bicycles, and motorized bicycles unless otherwise specifically indicated.

§47-11-1202. **Traffic laws apply to persons riding bicycles or motorized scooters.** Every person riding a bicycle or motorized scooter upon a roadway shall be granted all of the rights and shall be subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle by this title, except as to special regulations in this article and except to those provisions of this title which by their nature can have no application.

§47-11-1203. **Riding on bicycle or motorized scooter.**

- A. A person operating a bicycle shall ride upon or astride a permanent and regular attached seat.
- B. No bicycle or motorized scooter shall be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed and equipped.

§47-11-1204. **Clinging to vehicles.** No person riding upon any bicycle, motorized scooter, coaster, roller skates, sled, or toy vehicle shall attach the same or himself or herself to any vehicle upon a roadway.

§47-11-1205. **Riding on roadway, one-way street or highway.**

- A. Every person operating a bicycle or motorized scooter upon a roadway at less than the normal speed of traffic at the time and place and under the conditions then existing shall ride as close as is safe to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway, except under any of the following situations:
 - 1. When overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction;
 - 2. When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway;
 - 3. When reasonably necessary to avoid conditions and while exercising due care, including but not limited to:
 - a. fixed or moving objects,
 - b. parked or moving vehicles,
 - c. pedestrians or animals,
 - d. surface hazards, or
 - e. any time it is unsafe to continue along the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway; and
 - 4. When riding in the right-turn-only lane.

- B. Any person riding a bicycle or motorized scooter upon a one-way street or highway with two or more marked lanes of travel may ride as close as is safe to the left-hand curb or edge of the street or highway.
- C. No person operating a bicycle or motorized scooter shall pass other vehicles between lanes of traffic traveling in the same direction.
- D. Persons riding bicycles or motorized scooters upon a roadway shall not ride more than two abreast except on paths or parts of roadways set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles or motorized scooters. Persons riding two abreast shall not impede the normal and reasonable flow of traffic and, on a laned roadway, shall ride within a single lane.

§47-11-1206. Carrying articles. No person operating a bicycle or motorized scooter shall carry any package, bundle or article which prevents the driver from keeping at least one hand upon the handle bars.

§47-11-1208. Overtaking and passing bicycle—Violations—Fines and penalties.

- A. When overtaking and passing a bicycle proceeding in the same direction, a person driving a motor vehicle shall exercise due care by leaving a safe distance between the motor vehicle and the bicycle of not less than three (3) feet until the motor vehicle is safely past the overtaken bicycle.
- B. If a person violates the provisions of subsection A of this section and the violation results in a collision causing serious physical injury to another person, the person shall be subject to a fine of not more than Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00).
- C. If a person violates the provisions of subsection A of this section and the violation results in the death of another person, the person shall be subject to a fine of not more than One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00), in addition to any other penalties prescribed by law.

§47-12-201. When lighted lamps are required.

- A. The United States Department of Transportation specifications and standards for headlamps, auxiliary driving lamps, tail lamps, signal lamps, reflectors, and other lighting equipment and signal devices, pursuant to 49 C.F.R., Section 571.108, are hereby adopted by the State of Oklahoma.
- B. Except as otherwise provided in this chapter and subject to exceptions for parked vehicles, every vehicle upon a highway within this state shall properly display all lamps and illuminating devices as required by law:
 - 1. At any time from one-half (1/2) hour after sunset to one-half (1/2) hour before sunrise, also referred to in this chapter as nighttime; and
 - 2. At any other time when, due to insufficient light or unfavorable atmospheric conditions, persons and vehicles on the highway are not clearly discernible at a distance of one thousand (1,000) feet or less.
- C. All lamps required by this chapter shall display a steady light except as otherwise prescribed by this chapter. Any required individual lamp may be combined or incorporated with any other required individual lamp if the combined or incorporated lamps meet all of the individual lighting requirements of this chapter for each individual lamp contained therein.

D. No lamp, other than a headlamp, displayed on any vehicle shall project a glaring light; provided, every headlamp shall comply with Section 12-222 of this title.

§47-12-702. **Front lamp.** Every bicycle in use at the times described in subsection B of Section 12-201 of this title shall be equipped with a lamp on the front emitting a white light visible from a distance of at least one thousand (1,000) feet to the front. This section shall not apply to a street or highway with a speed limit of twenty-five (25) miles per hour or less.

§47-12-703. **Rear lamp.** Every bicycle in use at the times described in subsection B of Section 12-201 of this title shall be equipped with a lamp on the rear emitting a red light visible from a distance of at least one thousand (1,000) feet to the rear. This section shall not apply to a street or highway with a speed limit of twenty-five (25) miles per hour or less.

§47-12-704. **Reflector.** Every bicycle shall be equipped with a red reflector which shall be visible for six hundred (600) feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful lower beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle.

§47-12-706. **Reflective material.** Every bicycle when in use at the times described in subsection B of Section 12-201 of this title shall be equipped with reflective material of sufficient size and reflectivity to be visible from both sides for six hundred (600) feet when directly in front of lawful lower beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle.

§47-12-707. **Additional lights and reflectors.** A bicycle or its rider may be equipped with lights or reflectors in addition to those required by the foregoing sections; provided, such lights or reflectors shall comply with the provisions and limitations of Article II of Chapter 12 of this title.

§47-12-708. **Brakes.** Every bicycle shall be equipped with a brake or brakes which will enable its driver to stop the bicycle within twenty-five (25) feet from a speed of ten (10) miles per hour on dry, level, clean pavement.

§47-12-709. **Sirens.** A bicycle shall not be equipped with, nor shall any person use upon a bicycle, any siren.

3 Stillwater Relevant Cycling Laws

From Chapter 29, Article VII of the Stillwater Municipal Code.

§29-201. **Generally.**

- (a) It is a misdemeanor for any person to do any act forbidden or fail to perform any act required by this article.
- (b) The parent of any child and the guardian of any ward shall not authorize or knowingly permit any such child or ward to violate any of the provisions of this article.
- (c) These regulations applicable to bicycles shall apply whenever a bicycle is operated upon any highway or upon any path set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles subject to those exceptions stated herein.

§29-202. Traffic laws apply to persons riding bicycles. Every person riding a bicycle upon a roadway shall be granted all of the rights and shall be subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle by the laws of this state declaring rules of the road applicable to vehicles or by the traffic ordinances of this city applicable to the driver of a vehicle, except as to special regulations in this article and except as to those provisions of laws and ordinances which by their nature can have no application.

§29-203. Obedience to traffic-control devices.

- (a) Any person operating a bicycle shall obey the instructions of official traffic-control signals, signs, and other control devices applicable to vehicles, unless otherwise directed by a police officer.
- (b) Whenever authorized signs are erected indicating that no right or left or U-turn is permitted, no person operating a bicycle shall disobey the direction of any such sign, except where such person dismounts from the bicycle to make any such turn, in which event such person shall then obey the regulations applicable to pedestrians.

§29-204. Riding on bicycles.

- (a) A person propelling a bicycle shall not ride other than astride a permanent and regular seat attached thereto.
- (b) No bicycle shall be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed and equipped.

§29-205. Clinging to vehicles. No person riding upon any bicycle, coaster, roller skates, sled, or toy vehicle shall attach the same or himself to any vehicle upon a roadway.

§29-206. Riding on roadways and bicycle paths.

- (a) Every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to the right side of the roadway as practicable, exercising due care when passing a standing vehicle or one proceeding in the same direction.
- (b) Persons riding bicycles upon a roadway shall not ride more than two (2) abreast except on paths or parts of roadways set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles.
- (c) Wherever a usable path for bicycles has been provided adjacent to a roadway, bicycle riders shall use such path and shall not use the roadway.

§29-207. Speed. No person shall operate a bicycle at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions then existing.

§29-208. Emerging from alley or driveway. The operator of a bicycle emerging from an alley, driveway, or building shall, upon approaching a sidewalk or the sidewalk area extending across any alleyway, yield the right-of-way to all pedestrians approaching on said sidewalk or sidewalk area, and upon entering the roadway shall yield the right-of-way to all vehicles approaching on said roadway.

§29-209. Carrying articles. No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle, or article which prevents the rider from keeping at least one hand upon the handlebars.

§29-210. Parking. No person shall park a bicycle upon a street other than upon the roadway against the curb or upon the sidewalk in a rack to support the bicycle or against a building or at a curb, in such manner as to afford the least obstruction to pedestrian traffic. All bicycles parked upon business streets shall be parked in those bicycle parking zones designated by the traffic commission.

§29-211. Riding on sidewalks.

- (a) No person shall ride a bicycle upon a sidewalk within a business district.
- (b) The chief of police is authorized to have erected signs on any sidewalk or roadway prohibiting the riding of bicycles thereon by any person; and when such signs are in place, no person shall disobey the same.
- (c) Whenever any person is riding a bicycle upon a sidewalk, such person shall yield the right-of-way to any pedestrian and shall give audible signal before overtaking and passing such pedestrian.
- (d) Police bicycle officers are exempt from this section when in the performance of their duties.

§29-212. Lamps and other equipment on bicycles.

- 1. Every bicycle in use at nighttime shall be equipped with a lamp on the front which shall emit a white light visible from a distance of at least five hundred (500) feet to the front and with a red reflector on the rear of a type which shall be visible from a distance of fifty (50) feet to three hundred (300) feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful upper beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle. A lamp emitting a red light visible from a distance of five hundred (500) feet to the rear may be used in addition to the red reflector.
- 2. Every bicycle shall be equipped with a brake, which will enable the operator to make the braked wheel skid on dry, level, clean pavement.

§29-213. Use of earphones and headphones prohibited.

The use of earphones and headphones by persons riding bicycles is prohibited while said persons are using any public street or highway open to motor vehicle traffic. For purposes of this section, "public street or highway" shall not include any sidewalk.