

# Motorcycle Crashes Increase

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The Intelligencer

But the number of fatalities dropped.

When gasoline prices soared to historic highs last year, it seemed more people took to the roads on motorcycles, prompting concern there would be a spike in bike-related crashes and fatalities.

While there were more motorcycle crashes in Bucks and Montgomery counties in 2008 than 2007, fewer people died in the accidents. The news wasn't as good for Pennsylvania as a whole however: both crashes and fatalities increased across the Keystone State.

Still, the increases were not large. And while there were more registered motorcycles locally and statewide last year than 2007, officials said it's difficult to say if that rise or other variables influenced crashes and fatalities.

"A lot of different things factor into crashes," said Craig Yetter, a spokesman for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. "We cannot specifically pinpoint the reasons for fluctuations in the data from year to year."

In Bucks County, there were 234 motorcycle crashes in 2008, up from 209 in 2007, a rise of 12 percent. Nine people died in the crashes, down from 12.

The crash count was the highest for any year between 2002 and 2008. There were 233 motorcycle accidents in 2005 and 231 in 2006, about the same as the 2008 level.

The 12 deaths in 2007 were the most in any year during the same period.

In Montgomery County, 196 motorcycle accidents occurred in 2008, four more than in 2007, a 2 percent rise. Nine people died, one less than 2007, whose fatality count was the highest of any year between 2002 and 2008.

The most crashes for a year in Montgomery County happened in 2005, when 203 accidents were reported.

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There were 18,534 registered motorcycles in Bucks County and 17,834 in Montgomery County in 2008, increases of about 6.5 percent each over the prior year. The number of licensed motorcyclists increased as well, to 38,666 in Bucks and 43,664 in Montgomery.

Statewide, there were 4,192 motorcycle crashes last year, 82 more than in 2007, a rise of about 2 percent. Those crashes resulted in nearly 5 percent more deaths - 236 - than the year prior in which 225 people died.

Motorcycle-related accidents and deaths increased each year in Pennsylvania between 2002 and 2005. There was a decrease in 2006 that was followed by a 20 percent jump in 2007. Last year's fatality count represented a 76 percent spike over 2002, when 134 people died.

Pennsylvania had 386,157 registered motorcycles in 2008, up from 357,270 in 2007. That's an increase of 8 percent.

Officials say riders, whether experienced or beginners, should enroll in the Pennsylvania Motorcycle Safety Program, which teaches riders how to operate bikes in different roadway

situations. The class, which is free for Pennsylvania residents, consists of classroom time and practical training. More information is available at [pamsp.com](http://pamsp.com).

Other motorists can help prevent crashes by taking time to double-check for motorcycles.

"All drivers can help to reduce crashes by sharing the road, respecting and watching out for one another and obeying the law," said Yetter.