



States See Increase in OHV Sales, Use and Injuries During Pandemic

One of the effects of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic with its reduced social interactions is a surprising increase in off-highway vehicle (OHV) sales. According to *PowerSports Business*, dealers in the southwest report that major unit sales from January to May of 2020 were up more than 17% compared to the same period last year. The Motorcycle Industry Council says nationwide off-highway motorcycle sales were up nearly 20% in the first quarter. That's good news for dealers, but it comes with some bad news as well.

Five states have reported unusual increases in the number of all-terrain vehicle (ATV)-related accidents according to the Consumer Federation of America, a consumer safety watchdog group. Health care professionals in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Vermont have seen significantly more injuries, especially among children riding ATVs, than expected during school vacation months - usually the worst time of year for recreation-related accidents. Given that most kids' school years ended abruptly and early, more outdoor activity and accidents can be expected – but the increase in OHV sales and lack of activities such as summer camps and team sports means more kids are riding and having accidents.

Increased sales mean that people who have never operated OHVs before are now experiencing the sport for the first time. They are less likely to understand the laws regarding OHV use, the skills required for safe operation, or the principles of ethical OHV recreation. In New Mexico, people are riding in places such as paved roads where OHV use is not allowed, or in ways that are illegal such as letting kids ride without protective gear or proof of safety training.

Because of the shutdown, families purchasing new machines are less likely to find hands-on training programs in their areas, so they must rely on online safety training, such as the course links found on the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish OHV website, for information about using their new toys. OHV safety training remains of critical importance because many aspects of safe operation may not be obvious to first-time users.

Regardless of the type of OHV, safety training and use of protective gear help prevent accidents and injuries. In New Mexico, all riders and passengers under the age of 18 are required to wear helmets and eye protection, and all young operators are required to have proof they have completed an OHV safety course. Understanding state and local laws, and riding in accordance to outdoor ethics such as the *Tread Lightly!*[®] principles, are part of the materials online safety training providers will convey in their courses.

Different types of OHVs have specific characteristics that may not be obvious to first-time users:

- Recreational off-highway vehicles, or ROVs, while legal to operate on paved roads in New Mexico **only where allowed by a local ordinance or resolution**, are NOT designed for paved road use. They lack the safety equipment of crashworthy passenger cars, such as crumple zones, air bags or stability controls. ROV manufacturers stress that they should only be used in an off-pavement environment.
- All-terrain vehicles, or ATVs, are called “body-active” machines because the operator moving their body weight forward, rearward or side-to-side makes all the difference in the machine's stability while turning or in bumpy terrain. Like ROVs, **ATVs are not intended for paved-road use and are only legal on paved roads where allowed by a local ordinance or resolution**. Kids should always be supervised by a parent or guardian, and kids should only ride ATVs that are

age- and size-appropriate. Kids riding adult machines are much more likely to suffer accidents, injuries or fatalities.

- Off-highway motorcycles, or dirt bikes, are by far the most difficult OHVs to operate safely. Safe motorcycle operation requires special skills, coordination and balance that hands-on training can best provide. **New Mexico law does not allow dirt bikes on paved roads except to cross from one side to another.** Until our hands-on classes can be offered again, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Dirt Bike School offers tips and a practice guide for individual learning at https://dirtbikeschool.org/Downloads/Tips_Practice_Guide.pdf.

As with any motor vehicle, mixing alcohol or drugs with OHV use leads to accidents and worse. Operating under the influence is illegal. Anything that keeps a rider from performing as well as possible is a really bad idea. OHV recreation carries people to some of the most remote areas of New Mexico. If something goes wrong, help is not just minutes away, but sometimes hours or even days away. Being prepared for the unexpected, with spares and first aid/survival gear, can make the difference between getting home safely or spending the night on the trail.

As soon as the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish can resume hands-on safety training classes, ATV and dirt bike training will be available free of charge. Until then, please visit the OHV program website at <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/ohv/ohv-education/> for links to our approved online training providers.