

Training makes the difference for motorcycle riders

By April Phillips| Naval Safety Center Public Affairs

NORFOLK-- A Sailor was killed Sept. 5 while riding his motorcycle. Reports say he was traveling at a speed in excess of 130 miles per hour, and while he had attended the Basic Rider Course (BRC), he had not attended the Military Sport bike Rider Course (MSRC).

While motorcycle fatalities have declined steadily since 2008, that positive trend is slowing and there are still Navy and Marine Corps riders who require training.

Even the most devoted motorcyclists admit riding is a risky mode of transportation. With no seatbelts or steel cage for protection, there's less room for error making training vitally important. However, all motorcycles are not the same. In 2008, the Navy and Marine Corps lost 58 people to motorcycle crashes and the majority of them were on sport bikes. It became apparent that something had to be done to train Sailors and Marines to handle these bikes that were built for the track, however most were being ridden on the street.

In June of 2009, the MSRC was unveiled. It was designed to teach sport bike riders about the specifics of the motorcycles they ride.

"The sport bike course teaches handling characteristics, but students also learn about Operational Risk Management – and that's a big part of successful riding," said Dave Kerrick, head of the Naval Safety Center's traffic safety division.

Statistics show the course has been a huge success. In 2009, motorcycle fatalities dropped to 28 for the Fleet and in 2010 they were down to 21.

Unfortunately, the positive trend may be stalling.

"We've reached a plateau," Kerrick said candidly. To date in fiscal year 2011, 26 Sailors and Marines have been killed on motorcycles. Kerrick said it shows the importance of training.

"Get your people into the training," he said. "The untrained riders are still the ones being killed."

While several of the fatal crashes involved sport bike riders who had completed the BRC, they had not yet attended the MSRC. Approximately 2,000 known sport bike riders in the fleet have not received this training. Kerrick said many are frustrated because courses are full. Unfortunately, there are a large number of no shows and many classes have extra spaces available.

"If you have trouble getting into a class or if you have any questions, contact your base safety officer," said Kerrick. "The installation safety office needs to hear concerns so we can work to fix any issues."