

BIKE SAFETY BASICS

Riding a bike, whether you do it for transportation, recreation or health is fun and good for you! By following a few simple guidelines, you can be safe riding your bike wherever you go, whether on the road, multi-use path, or dirt trail!

Choosing a Bicycle

Bicycle safety begins with your bike -- ride one that fits you! Whether it's a road, mountain or commuting bike, a rider on a properly fitted bicycle should be able to stand over it with feet flat on the ground and not have the frame touch their bodies. Bikes that are too big are dangerous in emergency maneuvers. Riders should be able to comfortably reach all the controls of the bike. Beginning riders often favor a low seat position, but most experienced riders prefer a seat height that enables almost full leg extension on each pedal stroke. Naturally, your brakes and gears should work. For help with choosing, fitting or adjusting your bike, we urge you to visit a local bike shop.

Wear a Helmet!

A helmet provides the cheapest insurance against serious head injury available. A properly fitted and secured helmet is required to be worn when riding on the installation (Exception: local national employees are exempted from this requirement but are encouraged to wear the protective device).

- Helmets should be certified with either a Consumer Product Safety Commission Sticker (CPSC) sticker or the *Institut für Zweiradsicherheit e.V.*, or the Economic Commission of Europe for bicycle helmets.
- Helmets should be replaced if cracked or damaged, and about every 5 years in any case.
- Use the *Eye, Ear, and Mouth* tests to fit your helmet -- it should Level on the forehead above the eyes; adjust the straps so the adjustment buckle meets just below the ear and chin strap is below the chin. The helmet should pull down when you open your mouth wide, such as when you are yawning.

Dress “Bright and Tight”!

Being “bright and tight” means being seen, and not getting tangled up in your bike. When dressing for bike riding, it is best to wear clothes which are brightly colored for visibility.

Dressing to be seen when on a bicycle is one of the most important components of safe riding whenever you're on a public roadway. Ever notice how traffic workers wear bright colors for safety on the roads? You should too. (It's a good idea when you're walking, too!)

Remember, when riding on DoD installations during hours of darkness or reduced visibility bicyclists are required (highly encouraged off DOD installations) to wear reflective upper outer garment. Also, the bicycles must be equipped with an operable headlight that emits a white light and a taillight that emits a red light. We recommend using head and taillights with multiple LEDs if you are riding after dark.

Bicycle wheels must have two reflectors mounted 180 degrees apart on the spokes. Bicycle pedals must have reflectors designed and placed to be visible from the front and rear of the bicycle during darkness.

Dressing "tight" means no loose clothing that can get caught in the sprocket or chain or wrapped around the crank. Have you ever got a shoelace caught in a bike chain? How about a dirty or torn pant leg? It can make you crash. Take the extra five seconds to tuck your laces in, or to put a strap or rubber band around your pant cuff. Make sure nothing you're wearing (including backpacks, etc.) have any parts or straps that could get tangled in the bike.

"Tight" means secure your feet, too! Wear sturdy shoes with some toe protection. Riding in flip-flops or bare feet is a recipe for injury. Also, consider riding gloves, they can provide the same protection for your hands that shoes do for your feet.

Listen up!

- Wearing headphones, earphones, ear buds or other listening devices when riding on or adjacent to roadways on DOD installation is prohibited.
- Using a cell phone, other than hands-free, while riding a bicycle on or adjacent to roadways on DOD installations is prohibited.
- German Polizei may stop and apprehended or fine a bicyclists observed using a cell phones while riding a bicycle in the traffic environment.

The "ABCs" of Inspecting a Bike

Check **A**ir, **B**rakes, **C**hain and give a **Q**uick all over look at your bike—before you ride to make sure your bike is in good condition to go.

- *Check Air.* A properly inflated tire rolls fast and easy, and is more resistant to impact pinch flats. As a very general rule, fat tires with tubes should be inflated to a

pressure of around 35-45 lbs, hybrid tires should be around 75-80, and road bike tires 90-110. If the tire feels squishy, it is.

- *Check Brakes.* Pull your brake lever. It should move readily, and the brakes should be applying pressure to the wheel rim about halfway through the lever's movement. If you can pull the lever all the way to your handlebar, your brakes are too loose. Check your pads—make sure they are not touching the rubber of your tires. If you see metal, uneven wear or cracking, they need work. **WARNING:** brakes are essential safety equipment on your bike, and they need to work and be adjusted properly. If they don't work, and you are not sure about making repairs on your own brakes, visit your local bike shop!!
- *Check Chain and Cranks.* Your chain should look like metal—not rusty nor too grimy with old lube and dirt. You can clean your chain with any degreaser, and lube with a bicycle chain specific lubricant (available from your local bike shop). Your pedal cranks should be on securely and not be bent.
- *Quick Check:* If your bike has quick releases (lever-operated doohickeys that let you take a wheel off without using a wrench), make sure that they are tight. You should be able to read the word "Closed" on the side of the lever that is away from the bike. Otherwise, give your bike a quick look over -- things straight, aligned, all good from the way you left it last? At least once a month, give your wheels a spin -- if they wobble excessively, visit your local bike shop.

Follow the Rules of the Road

German law gives bicycles the same rights and responsibilities as any other vehicle operator, and expects riders to follow the standard and legal rules of the road. Doing so also provides a measure of legal protection in the event of an accident. Critical rules to follow are:

- *Ride on the right, with traffic.* Always ride with traffic, and keep as far to the right as is safe. You have the right to take possession of a travel lane to set up for a left turn, to pass another vehicle, or to avoid an "unsafe situation". Experienced riders often "take the lane" (move towards the center of the lane) to help drivers see them sooner or when approaching hazards. Leave plenty of room, at least 4 feet (if possible), when passing parked cars to avoid opening doors.
- *Be Predictable.* Always ride in a straight line and be predictable. Do not weave from side to side, or suddenly move out into traffic. Be alert and plan ahead to avoid obstacles. If the road is narrow for a bicycle and a car to travel side by side, the bicyclist should occupy the lane until it is safe to move back to the right. Always check over your shoulder before changing your lane position. Never weave between parked cars.

- *Obey traffic signs and signals.* Stop for stop signs, lights and yields. Never make someone give up their right of way because you are violating a rule.
- *Use hand signals to communicate.* It can be as simple as pointing in the direction you plan to go at an intersection. The standard hand signals in Germany are left arm/hand fully extended (straight out) for “left turn” and right arm/hand fully extended (straight out) for “right turn.”
- *Yield to pedestrians in all situations.* It is your responsibility to exercise extra caution around walkers, and to alert them that you’re approaching before passing with a bell or call. Bicyclists must yield to pedestrians in crosswalks. And be extra careful on multi-use paths and sidewalks. Children up to age 8 must be on the sidewalk, not in traffic. Children up to age 10 are permitted to ride on the sidewalk. Children over ten years old are prohibited from riding on the sidewalks. Sidewalks are not designed for vehicle traffic. Riding on the sidewalk puts bikes where traffic doesn’t expect them, jeopardizes walkers, and is statistically a dangerous place to ride.
- *Riding two abreast is only permitted on designated bicycle paths.* Riding side by side is forbidden on streets and roads. You must ride single file; even in bicycle lanes marked out on the streets. However, on designated bicycle pathways it is permitted to ride side by side but you must always yield to oncoming cyclists.
- *Do not drink (consume alcoholic beverages) and cycle.* If your blood alcohol exceeds the limits below you can be fined and you can lose your driver's license.