

Headline	Wearing the helmet right		
MediaTitle	Borneo Post (KK)		
Date	03 Jan 2012	Color	Black/white
Section	Home	Circulation	88,150
Page No	b2	Readership	166,173
Language	English	ArticleSize	297 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 1,710
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 5,130



# Wearing the helmet right

**KUALA LUMPUR:** "I know it's dangerous, but I only use the motorcycle once in a while. I don't think there's a need to buy a new helmet," said Nasir Sumarnio as he dons his aging motorcycle helmet.

He was referring to his decade-old helmet, with its telltale faded colour and protective padding protruding from the sides.

The 53-year-old, who lived at the Malaysian Rubber Board Quarters, said he had never been in a road accident before.

Meanwhile, postal worker Abdul Rashid Abidin, 23, said he observed current trends when choosing motorcycle helmets.

He believes in form over function. It was better to choose a trendy-looking helmet over one with better head protection.

"The helmet does come with a warning that says that it's unsuitable as protection for riding motorcycles, but I wear it anyway because it's fashionable," he told Bernama.

Those were among the reasons given by motorcyclists during a safety inspection on motorcycle helmets by the Road Safety Department and Exxonmobil at Km7, Sungai Buloh, recently.

Majority of the 150 motorcyclists interviewed seemed to have little idea of the importance of wearing their motorcycles helmets correctly and safely.

For them, wearing motorcycle helmets was just a matter of meeting legal requirements. It was done more to prevent arrest by road authorities than for their own safety and well-being.

Perhaps that is why it is common to see motorcyclists and pillion riders wearing old helmets or half helmets that are not approved by SIRIM.

Helmets that are unstrapped or not strapped securely can also result in it being dislodged during

an accident, resulting in the motorcyclist's injury or death.

According to the road safety website Dr Moto, many motorcyclists who have been involved in a road accident believe that helmet-wearing saved them from more serious injuries, especially on the face, head and brain.

Road safety studies show that wearing helmets can reduce brain damage from an accident by up to 65 per cent and reduce fatalities by 37 per cent.

In fact, a study from the renowned John Hopkins University in the U.S. shows that helmets could also reduce spinal injuries.

The study, which involved 40,000 road accidents involving motorcycles between 2002 and 2006, revealed that motorcyclists who wore helmets received 22 per cent less spinal injuries than those who did not.

The Road Safety Department in its inspection found that there was still low awareness on the importance of helmets, especially among those from rural areas.

The situation was also prevalent in housing areas. The common excuse was that short distances do not necessitate the wearing of helmets.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Public Transport Specialist Prof Dr Abd Rahman Md Nor attributed the attitude to a lack of fear for the law or the authorities.

Abd Rahman, who is also UKM's Vice Chancellor, said: "Their perception is that their chances of getting caught or fined are low, even during roadblocks."

The perception also led them to risk not only their lives, but also the children they transport with them without the use of helmets.

This leads to repetitive destructive behaviour that can eventually land them in an accident that could result in death.

He said it was high time that road authorities enforce traffic regulations on a stricter basis, as road user awareness has been shown to improve with stricter enforcement.

"The problem would continue

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to persist if road authorities give poor attention to the importance of the quality and proper wearing of helmets," he said.

He said that 87 per cent of deaths due to road accidents among motorcyclists involved the head. Those not wearing helmets were three times more exposed to the risk of head injuries.

"Children must wear appropriate-sized helmets. Failure to do so would expose them to the same risks of not wearing a helmet at all," he said.

The rising statistics in road accidents involving motorcyclists prompted ExxonMobil to contribute RM90,000 to the Road Safety Department. It was used for a campaign to disseminate 900 helmets at six selected Esso stations around the Klang Valley.

ExxonMobil Sales Manager Adibah Alip said the work culture at ExxonMobil, which focuses on the aspects of safety, prompted them to contribute to the campaign.

"We want to spread the awareness on the importance of road safety, especially among the younger generation, who make up a large number of motorcyclists in the country. We do not want to lose these generation of contributors to the nation's growth to lose their lives to road accidents.

"We hope this collaboration with the Road Safety Department will help form a new culture among motorcyclists," she said.

The campaign, also jointly carried out by the Road Transport Department and Royal Malaysia Police, also focused on disseminating guidelines on the correct usage of helmets.

The campaign locations include Esso Serdang Jaya, Esso Jalan Salleh, Sentul, Esso Taman Sri Gombak and Esso Jalan Selayang.

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Several motorcyclists waiting their turn for a safety inspection on motorcycle helmets by the Road Safety Department and Exxonmobil at Km7, Sungai Buloh, recently. - Bernama photo