

Environmental Police Urge Citizens to Follow Safe Off-Highway Vehicle Laws

Officers advocate for helmet use and safety courses

BOSTON – Friday, June 20, 2014 – As the warm weather draws off-highway vehicle (OHV) enthusiasts to riding trails across the Commonwealth, Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) are urging operators to drive safely and obey state laws.

Responsible for enforcing state recreation vehicle laws, MEP officers are reminding operators of safety guidelines, including the importance of wearing helmets. Youth operators under the age of 18 are required to take OHV safety courses and all operators are encouraged to undergo training on how to operate their vehicles safely.

“Summer is a great time to enjoy outdoor recreation in Massachusetts,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Maeve Vallety Bartlett. “By following a few simple safety rules, everyone can help to make our trails and waterways safe for everyone.”

Five people were killed last year in OHV-related accidents, according to the MEP. In 2013, MEP officers responded to 79 accidents involving OHVs, which include ATVs, motorized dirt bikes and recreation utility vehicles. There have been 20 fatal OHV accidents over the past five years, most caused by excessive speed or operator error. Of these accidents, 14 operators were either not wearing helmets or did not fasten them. Operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal and dramatically increases the likelihood of accidents resulting in personal injury or death.

“Operating OHVs without the proper safety education and riding gear, such as a proper fitting helmet, can lead to tragic results,” said Acting MEP Director Lt. Col. Chris Baker. “We encourage every OHV operator to follow the law by wearing their protective helmets, in addition to use common sense by driving at safe speeds to protect themselves, other riders, and everyone who may take to the trails this season.”

Safety Information:

- Be cognizant of others out on the trail. Hikers, bikers and horseback riders have the right of way over recreation vehicle operators.
- Share the trail. Anticipate oncoming traffic and those approaching from behind.
- Operation of recreation vehicles on public ways is prohibited.
- Become familiar with state laws, local restrictions and facility rules. Local restrictions may limit where riding is allowed and facilities may limit the use of certain vehicle types.
- Children under the age of 10 may not operate a recreation vehicle.

State law limits where riders may operate. Use of OHVs on any property without written landowner permission, including state Wildlife Management Areas, is unlawful and may result in fines up to \$1,000 and forfeiture of vehicles for subsequent offenses. Riding in a

water supply protection area such as the Quabbin or Wachusett Reservoirs can carry fines of up to \$10,000, plus up to one year in jail. Individuals who operate recreation vehicles on public ways can be cited with motor vehicle violations.

Some state parks managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) are open to recreation vehicles. For a list of open parks, visit the [DCR OHV page](#) .

To learn more about MEP, OHV safety and reporting OHV accidents, visit the MEP website at www.mass.gov/ole

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