

Safety Tips #7, by Ben Hochberg
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THE ENVIRONMENT

Even though we are in the midst of an election year and the politics are hot and heavy, and even though the title of this article is The Environment... don't worry, this isn't a political pitch for the Green Party. This is about being ready for whatever our surroundings have in store for us when we ride.

Once a year I lead a discussion and subsequent group ride in another part of the country from where I live. I go to southern Ohio to ride with my musician buddies in the Fur Peace Motorcycle Club. Prior to riding we discuss how to ride in a group and what to expect on the ride. We make a list of potential hazards we may encounter. Some of the things we have mentioned, which may or may not apply to the places and times you ride, are: wet leaves, poor visibility (due to overhanging trees, shadows, blind hills, blind curves, night time, fog), wet roads, roads with mud placed on them by trucks and farm equipment, the trucks and farm equipment themselves, debris (like truck re-caps), poor road surfaces, animals in or near the roadway (lots of deer in Ohio), etc., etc.; you get the idea. Ohio even has horses-and-buggies; it is Amish country. They move slowly, plus the horses leave little "deposits" on the road, which can be a problem...

Here in Colorado we have other things to add to the list, such as ice and snow, gravel, that chemical used to melt ice, and more. Think about it; what have I left off the list?

I always end the discussion by mentioning that perhaps the most significant potential hazard *is the group itself*. If you have ridden in a group of bikes, you know what I mean. It takes some special awareness and techniques to do this with relative safety. Some very experienced riders I know just won't ride in a group. If you choose to go ahead and do it, you must trust every rider implicitly.

One thing I have noticed when riding in a group is that car drivers don't know how to behave when they encounter a group of bikes. Watch for erratic behavior!

I believe that the single most important thing you can do prior to a ride is to think about the hazards you may encounter on that particular ride. Make a mental list. I usually listen to the weather report on my weather band radio in order to assist myself in getting prepared.

The "Rule of the Seven P's": prior proper planning prevents piss-poor performance.

Think ahead. Have more fun!