

Cycling Safety Guidelines

This document lists some basic actions that you can take to ensure your own safety, and the safety of others in a group when participating in Oakland Yellowjackets rides. We highly encourage everybody to follow these guidelines when cycling by themselves, or with other groups or clubs as well. (Note: Other cycling clubs and organizations may have their own specific rules and guidelines similar to, or in addition to these. Please respect them.)

In addition to these guidelines, we highly recommend that you always carry an ID card and emergency contact information with you on every ride. A customizable Emergency Card is available for free on the Oakland Yellowjackets website.

1. Make sure your bicycle is in good condition and working order

This may seem obvious to most, yet too many times we encounter riders who neglect basic bike prep matters. Learn the basics of bike mechanics and keep your bike in good working order.

QUICK RELEASE WHEEL AXELS (SKEWERS) - Quick release levers should be used to turn the whole skewer clockwise until almost, but not completely tight. Then the lever should be tightened to hold the wheel in place. It should take some force, but not too much, to tighten the lever. If any of this is unclear or you aren't sure you are doing it right, ask somebody for help.

TIRES - Check your bike tire (both front and rear) pressure and condition before each ride, even if they may have felt/looked OK just a few days earlier. When inflating a tire, check to make sure the tire is correctly seated in the rim. If there are bulges or uneven areas, get help before you ride the bike. Inspect both tires for wear. Do NOT ride if your tires are excessively worn or cut. For instance, if you can see threads under the rubber layer of a tire, do not ride your bike until you have that tire replaced. Rapid deflation of a tire (or blowouts) while riding can have very serious consequences.

BRAKES – Ensure that your brakes are functioning properly. When you squeeze your brake levers, you should not be able to “bottom-out” the lever against the handlebar. If this happens, your brakes may not be set properly (many models come with a release lever), or the brake cables may be worn or stretched. Make sure that your front and rear brake pads are not excessively worn and that the cables that connect to the caliper arms are not frayed. Do not ride your bicycle if your brakes are in less than optimal condition.

BIKE DAMAGE - If you have ever crashed your bicycle—even if you may consider the incident to be insignificant—inspect your bike carefully for damage before riding it again. This is particularly important for carbon fiber and aluminum frames, forks and components, which can fail suddenly and catastrophically if damaged. Look for any paint rippling, deep scratches, dents, hairline fractures, or other evidence of damage on the frame, stem, bars, crank arms, pedals, or wheels. Do not ride a damaged bike. Take it to a qualified professional or bike shop for inspection.

CREAKING NOISES - If your bike makes creaking noises, take it to a shop and have it fixed. While creaking noises are not always a warning of impending mechanical failure, many mechanical failures are preceded by creaking noises. Better to be safe and have a noise-free bike than find out the hard way that the creaking was caused by a part (such as handlebars, cranks and seatposts) that was about to fail.

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE - Have your bicycle routinely checked and maintained by a professional mechanic. They will be able to identify and correct many problems you could easily overlook about your bicycle frame, components and drivetrain.

2. Wear your helmet. Period.

Helmets are required on Oakland Yellowjackets rides. Helmets decrease the incidence and severity of head injuries. But they must fit correctly and be correctly positioned to be effective. They should be held snugly in place by the chin strap, and should be centered on the head, not resting far back exposing the forehead, or off to the left or right. It is sometimes difficult to adjust helmet straps so that the helmet is positioned correctly on your head. If you need help, check with a bike shop or with experienced members of the club. If you see another rider with a poorly positioned helmet, please help him/her adjust his/her helmet. Test your helmet by putting it on and hitting it hard with your hand, or bobbing your head forward several times. Your helmet should not move much when correctly worn.

3. Maintain control and focus when riding at ALL times

Always watch the road ahead of you, and be in control of your bike. This seems like the ultimate in obvious advice, yet too many people suffer bicycle crashes because they were inattentive—sometimes even for just a moment. Don't be one of them.

All too often during group rides, conversations with fellow riders compromise everybody's safety because we lose focus of what we're doing. Please be mindful of your own safety and the safety of those around you by always being in control, and aware of both the road ahead and your immediate surroundings (including rearward approaching traffic).

4. Deal with mental or physical impairment wisely

If you become dehydrated or unusually weak on a ride, stop riding and get help. Dehydration, malnutrition, exhaustion, overheating, and/or low blood sugar ("bonking") can diminish your ability to control your bike. Don't let your pride get the better of you (and your friends' safety).

5. Communicate with cyclists and drivers

When riding in a group, communicate with other riders, motorists and pedestrians. Many avoidable crashes occur due to poor communication between cyclists. Signal turns by pointing. Signal slowing and stopping by holding your arm out with your palm facing back. Call out any time you do anything unexpected. Since we share roadways with cars, it is equally important to communicate our planned movements (especially turns) with drivers. Failure to signal movements with drivers not only endangers you, it also promotes ill sentiments many drivers already have with cyclists.

When passing other cyclists, always announce your intention before making your move, by saying "On your left." And always pass only on the left. Passing riders on the right may force them into the line of vehicular traffic (or other passing cyclists) in an untimely and unsafe way.

6. Observe traffic rules and regulations

Cyclists enjoy many of the same privileges that motorists do on the road. But this means that cyclist must also observe all the same rules and regulations that drivers follow: most notably traffic signals, stop/yield signs, one-way streets and pedestrian crosswalks.

Never ride in the lane of opposing traffic, even if on a shoulder or bike lane.

7. Ride single-file as often as possible, and as far to the right as practicable

The California vehicle code also specifies that it is OK for cyclists to occupy roads that cars use, and even take a greater part of the traffic lane in order to avoid obstacles such as car doors and surface hazards. But this does NOT mean cyclists are free to ride two-abreast (side by side) when they feel like it. It is especially inadvisable to ride side by side with other riders on busy roadways.

Acquaint yourself with California Vehicle Code, § 21202, and how it affects the rights of bicyclists AND motorists alike.

8. Point out hazards

Road hazards include potholes and uneven pavement, train tracks, debris, pedestrians and joggers, cars about to pull out of a parking space, car doors opening in your riding path, cars entering the road from

side streets, cars approaching from the rear, construction zones, loose dogs, and any unanticipated conditions that could be dangerous. (See also “Obstacle / hazard avoidance Do’s and Don’ts, below)

9. If you can’t signal with your hand, speak up

If you need to keep both hands on your handlebar in order to maintain control of your bike, use verbal warnings to alert other riders about your movements and approaching hazards. Examples of verbal warnings include “Slowing”, “Stopping”, “Hole”, “Car Door”, etc. Make sure you speak loudly enough to be heard by others.

10. Pacelines: Don’t get carried away

Pacelines are fun, but they inherently increase risk. Sure, riding in a paceline has performance and efficiency benefits, but even these are not worth the risk of crashing and injuring yourself (and others) if you’re not confident riding in close proximity to others at higher speed. Do not ride in a paceline until you have received proper instruction on technique and etiquette. If you are riding in a paceline that seems disorganized or erratic, leave lots of space between your wheel and the wheel in front, or leave the paceline altogether. When initiating a paceline with another rider whom you may not know well, let that person know you are there—for both courtesy and safety’s sake.

11. Overlapping wheels – just DON’T do it

When riding behind another rider, do not “half-wheel” or let your front wheel overlap the front rider’s rear wheel. If the front rider swerves to miss an obstacle and hits your front wheel, it is more likely that you will go down, not the rider in front of you. It is always the responsibility of the rear rider to either stay back or stay far to the side so wheel overlaps do not occur.

12. Obstacle / hazard avoidance Do’s and Don’ts

The presence of certain hazards on the road such as broken glass or a pothole does NOT mean you can swerve to avoid them at will. DO announce the presence of the hazard well ahead of time and before you take an evasive maneuver. DON’T swerve out of the way suddenly, or at all, if doing so poses a risk to others who are riding close to you. For example, it is much safer to roll over broken glass or a manageable bump than to endanger your ride companions by forcing them into an unsafe position on the road. It is always better to have to deal with a flat tire (or even two) than to cause a fellow cyclist to crash.

13. Stay OFF the roadway when not in motion

When regrouping, waiting for other riders, or stopping to check route directions or even fixing a flat/mechanical problem, stay clearly off the roadway away from the lane of traffic. Several bicyclists have been hit by cars and killed in the last few years in the Bay Area while dismounted at the side of the road. Clear dangers notwithstanding, it’s also downright rude to be in other people’s way needlessly.

14. Descend hills and mountains carefully

Always keep your speed in check in advance. A safe descending speed is determined by how quickly you can react to obstacles or hazards that may appear around a bend, or as far as 100 feet or more ahead of you. Never go down a hill at a faster speed than you are confident with. Scan the road ahead continuously for obstacles, wet pavement, oil slicks, cars making turns onto side streets or pull outs, stopped cars, or anything out of the ordinary. If anything looks unusual, slow down. Similarly, if you are not capable of noticing a roadway more than 50 feet ahead, adjust your speed accordingly. Anticipate the movements you need to make well ahead of time.

15. Beware of wet roadways

Areas with poor drainage can support the growth of slick algae during the rainy season and beyond. An example exists on Tunnel Road. Be especially careful in these areas, particularly while descending. Point them out to others.

16. Loose objects and clothing

Avoid wearing or riding with clothing or objects that may interfere with your bicycle wheels, crank, chain or pedals while you ride. An object getting caught on any of these bike parts may present an unexpected situation that can cause you to crash.

17. Do not use your cell phone while riding

Even if you have a “hands-free” accessory, you must refrain from cell phone use while riding—especially when in a group. Phone conversations impair your focus and ability to react to unexpected situations when riding. If you must make or answer a call on your cell phone, pull over off the side of the road away from traffic and other riders, and stop completely before using your phone.

18. Avoid using earphones and headphones while riding

The proliferation of portable music players such as iPods and other MP3 players have made riders listening to music while cycling a more common site these days. California Law actually prohibits use of headphones and earphones while riding (California Vehicle Code, § 27400). While it isn't necessarily illegal to use such devices while riding, earphones and headphones can significantly impair your ability to hearing and attention. This constitutes a danger to you amidst traffic and to other cyclists around you. We strongly discourage you from using these when on group rides. If you see an individual wearing headphones on a club ride, we encourage you to ask him/her to remove them if they wish to ride with the group.

19. Use lights and reflectors if riding during dark hours

If you anticipate riding before sunrise or after sunset, be prepared with front and rear lights. Having your bike equipped with these is not only an issue of complying with the law (California Vehicle Code § 21201), but is smart for the sake of being seen by motorists and pedestrians. If riding at night or early morning, it is also advisable to use reflective accessories (such as ankle straps, arm bands or a reflective vest/jacket) to increase your visibility to drivers.

20. Be proactive and kind to your fellow cyclists: report roadway hazards

If you are riding in Alameda or Contra Costa counties and encounter road hazards, such as dangerous storm drain grates, bad potholes, or obstructions, report them online at <http://www.ebbc.org/hazard.html>. A link to this form is also available on the OYJ website's Links area. You will need to know the city or unincorporated county in which the hazard is located. The hazard report will be forwarded to staff in the relevant jurisdiction. This process often works.

Questions about this document may be directed to safety@oaklandyellowjackets.org, or by sending mail to Oakland Yellowjackets, 2185 Manzanita Drive, Oakland, CA 94611.