



Feedback for Possible Ordinance Allowing ATVs and UTVs on Public Roads

January 29, 2024

Dear Wisconsin Rapids Common Council Members,

My name is Courtney Griffin, and I am the Director of Consumer Product Safety for the Consumer Federation of America. Founded in 1968, CFA is one of the nation's largest consumer organizations working in the consumer interest through research, advocacy, and education. CFA represents over 250 national, state, and local groups.

CFA leads a coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries caused by off-highway vehicles (OHVs). Our OHV Safety Coalition tracks news reports and compiles [OHV fatalities](#) in real time. The data from OHV fatalities demonstrates the serious risk of OHVs use on roadways.

A. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Issued a Warning on the Rising Number of ATV/UTV Deaths

In September last year, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR) published a statement urging caution after recording an alarming rise in OHV deaths.¹ At the end of 2024, 40 people died as a result of an OHV accident.² Over half of these fatalities occurred on public roadways, including routes specifically closed to OHV use.

B. 2023 Fatality Data

CFA and its OHV Safety Coalition recently released the data it collected regarding death and injury related to OHV use in 2023. The data is subject to change as more deaths are reported. In 2023, CFA tracked at least 498 OHV fatalities. 19% of the deaths were children 15 years and younger. The

¹ ATV/UTV Riders: Ride Safe And Sober. (2024, September 5). Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/newsroom/release/98626>

² 2024 Of-Highway Vehicle Fatal Crash Summary As of January 14th, 2025. (2025, January 14). Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. <https://widnr.widen.net/s/prv5fqkjm/atv2024>



youngest children were only three years old. A staggering 67% of the OHV deaths were during on-road use.

58% of all OHV deaths were related to all-terrain vehicles (ATV). Of deaths attributed to ATVs, 19% were children 15 years and young. 67% of the ATV deaths occurred with on-road use.

C. Even ATV Industry Associations Strongly Warning Against Public Road Use

The Specialty Vehicle Institute of America (SVIA), which represents the manufacturers and distributors of ATVs, unequivocally opposes that use of ATVs on roads.³ SVIA emphasizes that **ATVs are not designed, manufactured, or in any way intended for use on public streets, roads or highways and urges that on-highway use of ATVs be prohibited.** ATV use on highways, as some elected officials in your state have called for, is in direct conflict with manufacturers' intentions for ATVs proper use and is contrary to federal safety requirements.

A training manual for ATV riders from the ATV Safety Institute, a division of SVIA, states:

“Remember, ATVs are intended for off-road use only. Never operate an ATV on public roads, and always avoid paved surfaces. ATVs are not designed 2 for use on public roads and other motorists may not see you. ATVs are not designed to be used on paved surfaces because pavement may seriously affect handling and control.”⁴

Further, the SVIA makes clear that:

ATVs are designed, manufactured, and sold for off-road use only. On-road vehicles must be manufactured and certified to comply with U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS). These safety standards consist of extensive and detailed compliance requirements. Since ATVs are not intended to be

³ Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, Position in Opposition to On-Road Operation of ATVs. <https://svia.org/opposition-to-on-road-use/>

⁴ Tips and Practice Guide for the All-Terrain Vehicle Rider, ATV Safety Institute. http://atvsafety.org/downloads/ATV_Riding_Tips.pdf



used on-road, they are not designed, equipped or tested to meet such standards.⁵

C. More OHV Deaths Occur On Roadways than Off-Road

Our coalition started collecting data to provide decision makers with a better sense of the dangers posed by OHVs. See our data and analysis on our OHV webpage [here](#). Last year's data demonstrates the danger of OHV on-road use: 67% of all OHV deaths last year were associated with on-road use. This is consistent with previous years.

- **ATV Roadway Crashes:** Roadway crashes are more likely to involve multiple fatalities, collisions and head injuries. Victims in roadway crashes were less likely to be wearing protective gear such as helmets and were more likely to be carrying passengers, both things that are risk factors for ATV-related fatalities and injuries. From 1998-2007, roadway fatalities increased twice as fast as those off-road.⁶ The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released ATV-related fatality statistics for public roads showing that there were 3,411 deaths from 2004-2013, with 323 in 2013 alone.⁷

D. OHV Design Contributes to Roadway Deaths and Injuries

Ultimately, OHVs are not safe on roads because they were not designed for roadway use.

- **OHVs⁸ have a relatively narrow track and high center of gravity:** These design features allow for riding in wooded areas and between obstacles, and provide high ground clearance for rough terrain.

⁵ Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, Position in Opposition to On-Road Operation of ATVs. <http://www.svia.org/Downloads/PositionPaperOpposingOn-RoadUse.pdf>

⁶ Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, Position in Opposition to On-Road Operation of ATVs. <http://www.svia.org/Downloads/PositionPaperOpposingOn-RoadUse.pdf>

⁷ NHTSA, Fatalities in Traffic Crashes Involving All-Terrain Vehicles. <http://www.nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812193.pdf>

⁸ The Denning paper cited below deals with ATVs but the CPSC Briefing Package on the Proposed ROV Rule, Pg. 518, notes that ROVs are designed with narrow track widths and high ground clearance for use on off-road trails which results in a high risk of rollovers. www.cpsc.gov/Global/Newsroom/FOIA/CommissionBriefingPackages/2014/SafetyStandardforRecreationOff-HighwayVehicles-ProposedRule.pdf



However, these features put OHVs at a higher risk for rollovers,⁹ and require “that the vehicle takes wider turns than are found in standard road design.”¹⁰

- **OHVs have low-pressure, deep tread tires designed for off-road use:** Automobile tires have relatively shallow tread and are designed to continually grip and release roadway surfaces. In contrast, OHV tires are made to grab off-road terrain and can act unpredictably on roadway surfaces, especially with increasing speed. The operator can easily lose control of the vehicle, potentially endangering the OHV rider, occupants of other vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists.¹¹
- **Most ATVs lack a rear differential:** Most ATVs have a solid rear axle or locked rear differential which means that both the inside and outside wheels rotate at the same speed, unlike motor vehicles designed for roadways. This often requires that the OHV “take wider turns than are found in standard road design,”¹² and makes it more difficult for OHVs to negotiate roadway curves, especially at the speeds often traveled on roads.

E. Children and OHVs Do Not Mix

Year after year, children continue to make up an alarming percentage of OHV fatalities.

Dr. Charles Jennissen, clinical professor at the University of Iowa, Carver College of Medicine has stated that “[m]ore kids in the US under 16 die from ATVs than bicycle crashes.”¹³ Dr. Jennissen has further noted that “[w]e talk a lot about bicycle safety for kids, *but this is a bigger killer, and we need to*

⁹ Denning, Harland, Ellis, Jennissen, More fatal all-terrain vehicle crashes occur on the roadway than off: increased risk-taking characterizes roadway fatalities, *Injury Prevention*, 2012. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3717765/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Id. Discussing ATV tires. The CPSC Briefing Package. Pg. 410. Also defines ROVs as having low pressure tires. This allows one to infer that both categories of OHVs discussed here will have tires that are not suitable for on-road use and will have similar problems when used on-road as those described for ATVs in the 2012 report cited above. www.cpsc.gov/Global/Newsroom/FOIA/CommissionBriefingPackages/2014/SafetyStandardforRecreationOff-HighwayVehicles-ProposedRule.pdf

¹² Denning, Harland, Ellis, Jennissen, More fatal all-terrain vehicle crashes occur on the roadway than off: increased risk-taking characterizes roadway fatalities, *Injury Prevention*, 2012. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3717765/>

¹³ Michigan Farm News. (2020, August 7). Surge in child ATV injuries coincides with COVID-19



*protect our children.*¹⁴ Alarming, recent research from Dr. Jennissen shows that incidents are on the rise across the nation.¹⁵ Public health officials have also documented an increase in OHV deaths and injuries, likely tied to school closures and stay-at-home orders. CFA has identified that 16 states are reporting increases in OHV deaths and injuries, through media reports.

F. Additional Information and Conclusion

The latest research about OHVs on roadways and OHV deaths and injuries, as well as a list of members of a national coalition formed to address this public health crisis and the advocacy efforts undertaken by this coalition are available [here](#).

We urge you to carefully consider any plans to allow OHV access on village, town, and city roads, keeping in mind the serious risk on-road use poses. If Deerfield moves forward with increasing OHV access on roads, we urge you to carefully consider the fatality data and ensure children are protected from serious injury and death by setting robust and enforceable age limits for OHV drivers and occupants.

We hope that you will consider these comments, and if we can be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact Courtney Griffin at Consumer Federation of America at cgriffin@consumerfed.org or (202) 567-7240.

Sincerely,

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¹⁴ Ibid, emphasis added.

¹⁵ Ibid.



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