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All-terrain vehicle (ATV) safety

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Ayers, Paul D./All-terrain vehicle (ATV)

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Quick Facts

- All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are three- and four-wheeled, small, motorized cycles designed for off-road use.
- ATV numbers have increased rapidly in rural America, and consequently, ATV-related injuries and deaths have increased.
- Professional instruction and certification, safe speeds, protective gear (especially a safety helmet), adherence to laws and regulations can reduce accidents.
- Using ATVs for field chores requires special care.
- Operating tips also provide additional safety measures.

Rural America is rapidly becoming swamped with all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), mostly for recreational use. Three- and four-wheeled ATVs are small motorized cycles with large, soft tires and are designed for off-road use on a variety of terrains. In April 1985, an estimated 1.8 million ATVs were in use—an increase to 2.5 million is expected by the end of 1985.

Although ATVs are fun to operate, there has been a dramatic increase in injuries and deaths associated with these oversized, motorized three-wheelers. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has estimated the number of ATV-related injuries (treated in hospital rooms) jumped from 8,600 in 1982 to 27,600 in 1983. Almost 76,000 injuries occurred in 1984 and more than 100,000 are expected in 1985.

More than 100 ATV-related deaths occurred from 1982 through 1984; many could have been prevented if the operator had been wearing a safety helmet. Of these fatal accidents, 22 percent involved operators less than 12 years old. An estimated 100 fatalities will occur in 1985.

Reduce Accidents

The CPSC and the Specialty Institute of America believe ATV accidents can be reduced if the following safety rules are observed:

- Three-wheeled ATVs have unique handling characteristics. Beginning riders should get professional instruction and certification. Practice first on a level area and then in a more difficult, but controlled, environment before riding an ATV in rough or unfamiliar terrain.
- CPSC injury investigations show that the majority of accidents occur when the ATV unexpectedly encounters an obstacle, such as a rock or ditch. Do not exceed speeds that are safe for the terrain you are traveling.
- Parents, remember that ATVs are not simply overgrown tricycles. Children should use motorized ATVs only after they receive instruction under adult supervision and only when they are old enough to safely handle them.
- Always wear an approved protective helmet and other protective gear.
- Three-wheeled ATVs are designed for one rider only. Do not ride double.
- Do not operate ATVs when using alcoholic beverages.
- Always read the instruction manual and follow the manufacturers' guidance for use, maintenance and pre-use checks.
- Do not use ATVs on paved roads or streets.
- Observe local laws or regulations and any regulations that have been established for public recreational areas where ATV use is permitted.
- Always use good judgment when operating your ATV.

Call the CPSC Hotline at (800) 638-2772 for further information on ATV safety.

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To simplify technical terminology, trade names of products and equipment occasionally will be used. No endorsement of products named is intended nor is criticism implied of products not mentioned.

Use Good Sense

Loss of vehicle control causes most accidents. When the operator encounters a change of terrain or swerves to avoid an obstacle, it causes an abrupt change of balance and loss of control.

Collisions with automobiles on public roads are the most common cause of fatal ATV accidents. It is illegal to operate an ATV on public roads.

Clothing and protective gear are important for safe ATV operation. A safety helmet that meets federal standards is the best protection an ATV operator can have. Goggles, high-top boots, gloves, sturdy jackets and pants also should be standard attire. Protection from the cold is important due to increased wind chill at high speeds. Do not wear scarves or loose clothing because of potential entanglement with moving parts.

Take care when using an ATV for field chores. Mounting a sprayer tank on the rear of the vehicle increases the chances for a rear turnover. Also, tying a load to the bar behind the ATV seat can cause a rear turnover if the pull is large. Attach loads under the vehicle on the frame.

Additional Safety Tips

1. To turn an ATV, keep most of your body

weight on the outside foot peg and lean your upper body into the turn.

2. When climbing hills, shift your body weight forward by leaning to keep the front wheel(s) on the ground.
3. If stopped while going uphill, do not apply the rear brake. Get off the machine and turn it around to proceed down the hill.
4. When going down hills, keep the engine running and in gear, apply rear brake and avoid sharp turns.
5. Avoid "side hill" situations, but when necessary, lean into the hill.
6. As a last resort to avoid an impending collision, roll off the vehicle and kick yourself free of it.

References

National Safety Council, Spring 1985, Agri-Safety Newsletter.

U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, Consumer Product Safety Alert, December 1984, "CPSC Urges Caution for Three-Wheeled All-Terrain Vehicles."

University of Alaska Cooperative Extensive Service, "Making Tracks Safely with Your All-Terrain Vehicles."

Table 1: ATV sales.*

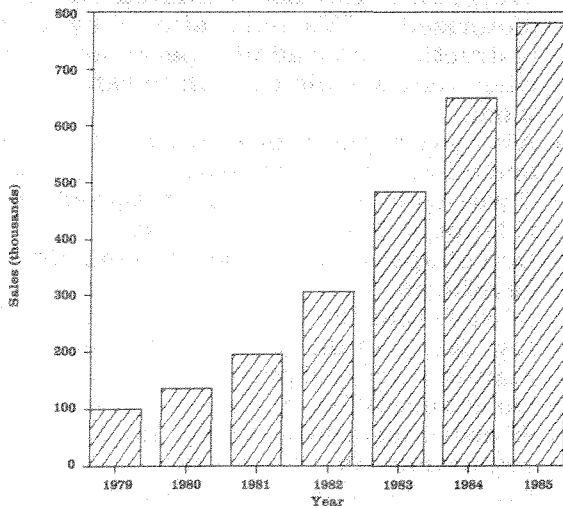


Table 2: ATV accidents.*

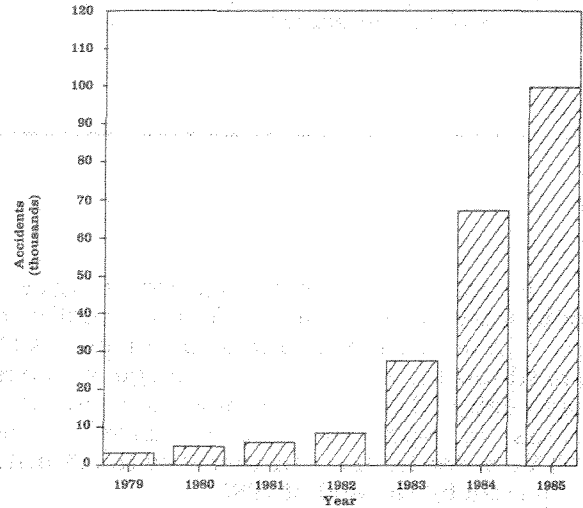
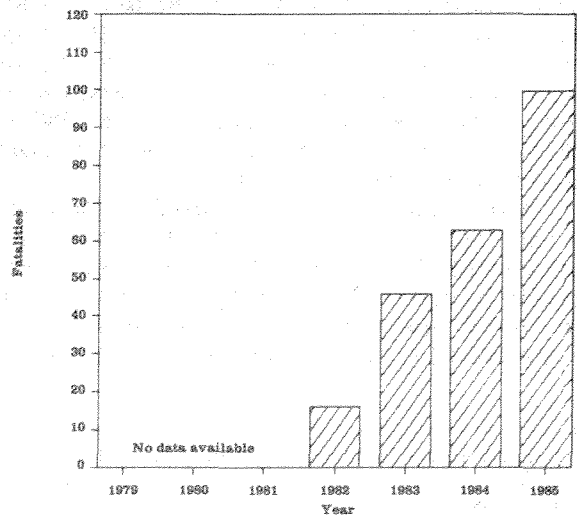


Table 3: ATV fatalities*



*Figures estimated by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, May 1984.