

ATV study– 10/31/07

By Keri Brown

Lead: West Virginia has the nation's highest all-terrain vehicle death rate. Eleven people died in all-terrain vehicle crashes last month, which was a record high in the state. A new study released by a non profit group in Washington D.C. takes a closer look at the costs of ATV accidents. Keri Brown reports.

Brown: The study released by the group Concerned Families for ATV safety is based on data collected from hospitals in 37 states, including WV. The research looks at 2000 to 2004 statistics. Jim Helmkamp, is the director of the West Virginia University Injury Control Research Center. He conducted the study

Helmkamp: Over the 5 year period estimated 59,000 children and adults were admitted to hospitals for ATV injuries.

Brown: Helmkamp says there is a growing trend in the number of children involved in severe ATV crashes.

Helmkamp: Four atv deaths in children each week and 70 more kids injured and have to go to hospital every week none with led based toys. Those statistics prompted Helmkamp to take his study a step further. He also examined the financial burden that these ATV accidents are having on the system.

Helmkamp: Those costs have increased nearly 200% to \$71M collective cost over a billion ¼ government money like Medicaid it's a public health crisis that's affecting all of us)

Brown: Helmkamp says the size of the machine doesn't matter when it comes to children involved in ATV accidents. The study also looks at bicycle injuries and compares and contrasts these figures with ATV injuries. Dr. Denise Dowd is a pediatrician at Children's Hospital in Kansas City Missouri. She is also an advocate for ATV reform.

Dowd says anyone under the age of 16 should not be allowed to operate an ATV. Dowd: An ATV is motorized vehicle although not regulated like that that is what it is. We don't give 8 and 9 year-old, they lack the judgment, physical and motor skills to operate these vehicles.

Brown: Two ATV safety bills failed to pass in the state legislature this past session. The bills called for registering ATV's like automobiles, and establishing a single form for the State Police to use when reporting accidents. The bills also would have banned ATVs on paved roads, prohibited passengers unless allowed by manufacturers and given counties the authority to pass their own regulations. Helmkamp hopes his study will bring awareness for ATV reform.

Helmkamp: In WV law 2004 helmets under 18 but data shows kids and adults not wearing them we have seen in data in WV in 2007 43 deaths so far, 80% have occurred on pave surfaces and require helmet use by everyone not just children.

Brown: Cabell County Delegate Jim Morgan says getting more ATV reform passed in WV may be difficult. He says change should start at the local level.

Morgan: It's permissive now but something mandatory before accept ATV instructed for proper use. Maybe even in schools and areas where ATVs are predominant type of recreation take mandatory training so if you own one or not know what to do with it something like that.

Brown: Meanwhile, The Concerned Families for ATV safety is asking Congress to investigate and put pressure on the Consumer Product Safety Commission to make changes to protect children from ATV's.

For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Keri Brown in Bethany.