
ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE (ATV) SAFETY CRISIS

At first glance, all-terrain vehicles, or ATVs, may seem harmless enough, given their big tires, apparently wide stance, four-wheel drive and cushy seat, but appearances are deceiving. These vehicles are built and marketed for speed with many ATVs capable of traveling up to 75 miles per hour. They seriously injure and kill more than 126,000 Americans every year, and the real tragedy is that children younger than 16 years old pay the heaviest price.

For more than a decade, the toll on children has been climbing dramatically while the off-road vehicle industry has aggressively marketed bigger, faster, and more powerful ATVs. Pediatricians, orthopedic surgeons, nurses, consumer advocates and others believe it is time to say enough is enough to the industry's approach to ATV safety, an approach that can best be described as self-regulation.

ATVs are Bigger and Faster than Ever:

The off-road vehicle industry is aggressively building and marketing bigger and faster ATVs.

- The average adult-size ATV weighed 550 pounds in model year 2001. Many ATVs can travel as fast as 75 miles per hour, without modification.
- According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the number of ATVs with the most powerful engines (400 cc or larger) increased by more than 200 percent between 1997 and 2001 to at least 1.1 million. (All-Terrain Vehicle 2001 Injury and Exposure Studies, 2003).

Rising Injuries and Fatalities:

As bigger and faster ATVs have been introduced into the market over the past decade, ATV-related injuries and deaths have increased significantly. By virtually every measure, injuries and fatalities are once again approaching levels that prompted CPSC to force the phase-out of highly dangerous three-wheel ATVs in the late 1980s. The following data has been gathered by CPSC:

- Between 1993 and 2002, estimated ATV-related deaths increased 200 percent from 211 to at least 621.
- Between 1993 and 2003, the estimated number of ATV-related injuries requiring emergency room treatment more than doubled to 125,500.

- The ATV industry attempts to explain away these increases by maintaining that more injuries will occur as the number of ATVs grows. However, CPSC has repeatedly concluded that the increase in injuries is not solely explained by rising sales or increased usage.
- Injuries caused by bigger and faster ATVs, those with engines larger than 400 cc, increased by 567 percent to 24,437 between 1997 and 2001. This increase is more than twice as great as the increase in the number of these ATVs in use during this period.

Children Under 16 are Most at Risk:

While ATV-related injuries and deaths have increased across all age groups, children under 16 suffer disproportionately and face the highest risks. The CPSC has reached the following conclusions:

- While children under age 16 accounted for a declining percentage of all ATV drivers between 1985 and 2003, they disproportionately suffered approximately 37 percent of all serious injuries during this period.
- Between 1993 and 2003, serious ATV-related injuries suffered by children younger than 16 more than doubled to 38,600.
- During the past decade (1993 to 2003), children under 16 received more serious injuries than any other age group every year except one.

- Between 1982 and 2003, at least 1,846 children under 16 were killed while riding ATVs. Of those, 778 were children under age 12. During this period, children suffered 32 percent of all deaths.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons have issued formal policies highlighting the serious risks ATVs pose to children under age 16. These doctors recommend that children not be allowed to operate ATVs under any circumstance.

Four-Wheelers Just as Dangerous as Three-Wheelers:

Many Americans probably believe that the conversion from three-wheel to four-wheel ATVs in the late 1980s would produce sustained safety improvements. However, medical research and comprehensive analysis by CPSC directly challenge the assumption that four-wheel ATVs are fundamentally safer than the three-wheel machines.

- In a 1998 study, doctors from Arkansas conclude: “Although manufacturers have touted the four-wheel vehicles as being safer than the three-wheel variety, the relative increase in safety is negligible ... Injuries sustained in accidents involving four-wheel ATVs are just as severe as those incurred with three-wheel ATVs.” (Russell et al, 1998)
- CPSC concludes that four-wheel ATVs are as prone to tipping over as three-wheelers. It found that ATVs (regardless of the number of wheels) were more likely to tip over back to front than side to side (57 percent to 43 percent of accidents). It also states that, “[T]he proportion of [side] to [backward/ forward] tip over was not different between 3- and four-wheel ATVs.” (All-Terrain Vehicle Injury and Exposure Studies, 1998)

Industry’s Voluntary Approach to Safety is Not Working:

In 1998, the ATV industry assumed a voluntary approach to safety. This method relies on fine print in advertisements, warning labels and internal policies

recommending against the sale of adult-size ATVs (defined as ATVs with engines bigger than 90 cc) for use by children under age 16 – all of which are implemented at the discretion of manufacturers and dealers. A CPSC assessment of ATV-related injuries since self-regulation began makes clear that this approach is ineffective. By tracking trends between 1997 and 2001, CPSC concludes:

- Injuries increased substantially across every age group ranging from 23 percent for children ages six to 12, to 233 percent for children younger than six, to 502 percent for adults 65 and older.
- Children continue to be injured overwhelmingly by adult-size ATVs, which the industry maintains are not sold for use by children. CPSC concluded that 87 percent of injuries suffered by children under 16 in 2001, or more than 22,700 injuries, were caused by ATVs with engines larger than 90 cc.
- Only seven percent of all ATV riders have ever received formal safety training from a dealer, salesperson or organized training program. (All above from: CPSC, All-Terrain Vehicle 2001 Injury and Exposure Studies, 2003)
- In a hidden camera investigation in 2002, Good Morning America found nine of ten randomly selected dealers recommended an adult-size ATV for a 14-year-old driver. In one case, a salesperson initially told the reporter about the age limits then proceeded to explain how to evade them.
- CPSC itself has documented significant dealer noncompliance with these voluntary standards. It acknowledges: “Compliance with the recommendations appears to have declined in recent years; in 1998, compliance was 85 percent, and in the years 2002 and 2003, 60 percent. However, for 2004, the compliance was 70 percent. The declining dealer compliance with age recommendations from 1998 to 2004 may be related to reduced stringency of the ATV Voluntary Action Plans, relative to the legally binding consent decrees.” (Briefing Package: Request to Ban All-Terrain Vehicles Sold for Use by Children Under 16 Years Old, 2005)