

ATV Safety

In January of 2005 the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimated that all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) had been the cause of 125,500 injuries in 2003 that required Emergency Department treatment. The year 2003 is the second consecutive record-breaking year. It is also estimated by the CPSC that ATV-related deaths were the highest ever, rising to a minimum of 621 in 2002. The largest injury group that continues to suffer more injuries than any other age group are those in the age range under of 16 years of age.

A public health crisis has been established in this country due to the increased numbers of deaths and injuries caused by ATVs. Safety restrictions must be established and enforced by law to provide a safe environment for our community. The National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses (NAON) has been working with the Bluewater Network, The Consumer Federation of America, and the American Academy of Pediatrics to bring this issue under control.

“As nurses who initiate immediate care to patients admitted for ATV injuries, the monetary costs for CPSC to regulate ATV dealers are insignificant compared to the sorrow and pain of parents and family members of ATV victims. If stronger regulation of ATV safety would save the life of one young child, it would be worth it all” stated by Linda Altizer, RN and member of the Executive Board of Directors, NAON.

Jeffrey Upperman, MD, a surgeon at Children’s Hospital in Pittsburg, PA., stated, “The number of children treated for ATV-related injuries at Children’s Hospital has more than tripled since 1998. Young children do not have the cognitive skills, are the size or have the strength to safely drive these vehicles, and often their injuries are more severe because they are not wearing proper safety equipment, such as a helmet.”

Some of the major statistics reported in the CPSC 2003 Annual Report on All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) are as follows:

- Serious injuries requiring emergency room treatment increased 10% from 113,900 in 2002 to 125,500 in 2003
- The estimated number of ATV-related fatalities increased from 609 in 2001 to 621 in 2002
- In 2003, ATVs killed at least 111 children younger than 16 years of age accounting for 27% of all fatalities.
- Children under 16 suffered 38,600 serious injuries in 2003 which was 31% of all injuries. This age group received more serious injuries than any other group.
- Between 1985 and 2003, children under 16 accounted for 37% of all injuries.

The CPSC has estimated that 6.2 million four-wheel ATVs were in use in 2003, which was twice as many as five years earlier. The increase in use also increases the risk

for severe injury and death. Because of this tremendous increase of injuries and fatalities, NAON, along with other organizations, have proceeded to initiate safety guidelines. Hopefully, these guidelines will become enforced laws and will prevent further injuries. It is much easier to prevent an injury than to “fix it”. Our goal is to increase patient safety and educate the community on the hazards involved with youth and ATVs. The following are potential guidelines that we are striving to initiate:

--Children 16 years of age and under are prohibited from driving dangerous adult-size ATVs.

--Manufacturers will develop and implement safety features on each ATV, such as a roller bar and seat belt

--Prior to riding an adult ATV, 16 year-olds and older must successfully complete a safety class which also requires the use of helmets.

--Prior to riding a child size ATV, 16 year-olds and younger must be presented with a safety class and requires that they wear helmets.

ATVs are looked upon by children as “toys”. They are NOT toys! They are extremely hazardous and life threatening. Control must be taken soon to govern over the use of ATVs, or the death and injury rate will continue to sky rocket. If you desire further information, or if you have any ideas of how child ATV safety can be improved, please feel free to contact Linda Altizer, RN (NAON) at 301-745-4255 or Scott Kovarovics (NTVC) at 202-429-3696.