

## Bicycle Safety for Food Delivery Workers

When using bicycles to make food deliveries, it's vital to prioritize your employees' safety. After all, riding a bicycle on public roads—especially while transporting food—poses unique hazards. Failing to take sufficient precautions could lead to serious injuries or even death. In fact, data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that more than 900 bicyclists are killed in traffic crashes each year, with such deaths peaking between the months of June and September.

Don't put your employees in harm's way on their delivery route. Read on for an overview of the primary risks that employees should be trained on while conducting food deliveries on a bicycle and best practices to help prevent potential safety incidents.

### Bicycle Safety Risks

There are several hazards that may arise from riding a bicycle, some of which could be compounded by transporting and delivering food. Here are some safety risks to consider:

- **Falls and crashes**—Improper balance, reduced traction or limited visibility could all cause employees to fall or crash while operating a bicycle. These incidents may lead to various injuries, including sprains, strains, cuts and lacerations. Such incidents can be especially common if the delivery orders are too heavy or not adequately secured within the bicycle, the route requires travel on uneven or poorly maintained roads, or employees frequently make deliveries in the darkness (i.e., during evening hours).
- **Struck-by incidents**—While riding a bicycle, employees are at risk of getting struck by motor vehicles or other objects on the delivery route. Struck-by incidents may result in broken bones, head trauma or death. These incidents are more likely to occur at night when drivers have reduced visibility; in road construction zones; and in high-traffic areas. According to NHTSA data, nearly 75% of bicyclist fatalities take place in urban locations. Additionally, this data revealed that drivers failing to yield the right of way to bicyclists and poor visibility are the top causes of such fatalities.
- **Outdoor exposures**—Because making deliveries on a bicycle requires employees to spend prolonged periods outdoors, they may be exposed to adverse weather conditions (e.g., hot or cold temperatures, rain, ice and snow). These conditions could create a number of hazards on the roadways, increasing the likelihood of falls and crashes. What's more, certain conditions—namely, hot or cold temperatures—could elevate their risk of ailments such as heatstroke, hypothermia, frostbite and cardiac arrest on the delivery route.

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- **Thefts and robberies**—Carrying cash from deliveries may increase an employee’s chance of being targeted in thefts or robberies on a bicycle. In some cases, criminals may even resort to violence during these incidents, potentially causing serious injuries.

Fortunately, many of the hazards associated with making food deliveries on a bicycle can be prevented or mitigated with proper safety precautions.

## Incident Prevention

Employers like you should train their employees to utilize the following best practices to promote bicycle safety and prevent possible incidents on their delivery routes:

- **Ensure the bicycle fits the body.** Using a bicycle that doesn’t fit correctly could make the rider more susceptible to injuries. As such, confirm that employees can fully extend their legs while pedaling and ride comfortably on their bicycles before using them for deliveries. Take bicycles to a local bicycle shop if they need further assistance with getting them fitted.
- **Inspect and maintain the bicycle.** Be sure to keep all bicycles in good condition by regularly inspecting them and conducting maintenance as needed. Pay special attention to the bicycle’s brake, frame, seat, pedals, tires, rims, spokes, hubs, gears, chain and handlebars. If an employee frequently rides at night, equip their bicycle with a headlight and rear reflectors.
- **Wear proper clothing and equipment.** Employees should always wear a helmet when riding their bicycles to adequately protect their heads. In addition, they should wear tight-fitting clothing that won’t get caught in the bicycle’s chain as well as durable shoes. If shoes have laces, they should be firmly tied. When riding during the day, employees should wear brightly colored clothing. When riding at night, they should wear reflective clothing. If the weather is cold, snowy or wet, employees should dress in warm, waterproof layers.
- **Plan the delivery route.** Work with employees to make sure they are selecting a safe delivery route before they begin their delivery. You and your employees should aim to establish a route that offers a designated bicycle lane or path for most—if not all—of the journey. Construction zones should be avoided, in addition to areas with heavy traffic and roads that are poorly maintained or lack ample lighting (especially at night) whenever possible. Shortcuts should never be taken in the interest of saving time or making faster deliveries.
- **Keep food deliveries secure.** Employees should ensure food deliveries remain secure by placing them in a backpack and wearing it while they ride, putting them in a basket attached to the bicycle or strapping them directly to the bicycle. Failing to keep deliveries secure or attaching them to the bicycle in a way that throws off a rider’s balance could lead to falls and crashes.
- **Obey the rules of the road.** Employees must follow all street signs, road markings and traffic laws. Specifically, they should come to a full stop at any red lights and stop signs; know hand signals and leverage them as needed to communicate with others on the road; and cross streets at designated intersection crosswalks.
- **Ride defensively.** Employees should be trained to be defensive bicyclists by remaining focused and alert to surrounding traffic. They should try

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their best to anticipate what others may do on the road and respond accordingly. Further, they should assume they aren't visible to others while riding their bicycle and should always be on the lookout for hazards that could threaten their safety (e.g., animals, pedestrians, pools of water, ice, potholes, grates and train tracks). They should refrain from distracting activities while they ride, such as texting or listening to music.

- **Act predictably.** Employees should operate their bicycles in a predictable way by riding in the same direction as all other traffic, using a bicycle lane or path whenever it's available, avoiding sidewalk riding (unless it's legal), making their presence known to pedestrians as they pass them, looking both ways before crossing the street, and slowing down while taking turns or before exiting driveways.
- **Avoid road rage or physical altercations.** Employees should stay calm while they ride and try not to get angry or upset with others on the road. If a driver acts irate toward the rider, the employee should not react and continue riding. Responding to an upset driver could lead to a physical altercation and subsequent injuries. If someone attempts to steal cash, food or the bicycle from the employee, the employee should give them what they want rather than trying to fight them off; the employee's safety is more important than any money or possessions. Employees should report such incidents immediately afterward to their supervisor.
- **Aim for improvement.** You and your employees should continue educating yourselves on bicycle safety and proper riding techniques. Consider providing additional riding safety or skills courses through a local bicycle shop, recreation

department or advocacy group to their employees.

## Conclusion

Overall, it's evident that using a bicycle to make food deliveries comes with various risks. Yet, by following proper precautions on the road, you can ensure a safe and successful delivery route for your employees.

For more risk management guidance, contact ToughComp today.

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