

Compliance with All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Standards: ATV Safety and Positive Youth Development

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and Transportation - Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Product Safety, and
Insurance**

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify about ATV safety. I share your deep concern about this issue. Every year, far too many people are injured or killed while driving ATVs. But I speak to you today convinced there is a viable way to dramatically reduce this problem. Youth-focused training programs based on sound educational principles have proven effective in improving attitudes and behaviors relating to ATV safety.

We need these types of programs now more than ever. Since 1985, children under the age of 16 have consistently represented the largest category of people injured while using ATVs according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) research. And there is likely to be an increase in the number of young ATV riders in the near future. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, our nation's population pyramid currently bulges at the ages of 13-20.

Clearly, we must address the main risk factors, which include riding without a helmet and without training, while carrying passengers, driving on paved roads, and under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs. In addition, many young people regularly ride ATVs that are simply too big for them. Consequently, the 4-H movement fully supports the CPSC stance that youth under the age of 16 should not operate adult-size ATVs.

While rules and regulations play a vital role in mitigating these risks, they are very hard to enforce. That is one reason why I advocate that all youth should have to complete safety training before they ride independently.

I'm proud to say that the 4-H Community ATV Safety Program has been committed to this goal for more than 20 years. With the Commission's support, we've reached more than eighteen (18) million youth and adults through courses, workshops, exhibits, classroom activities, and regular 4-H club meetings. These experiences are supported by small grants and specialized curriculum funded by private donors.

And the results have been excellent. For example, a 2002 study conducted by Halley Research demonstrated that our program helped increase the number of youth who always wear helmets by nearly 10%. I was also impressed with the report's qualitative findings. One participant said, "I shared with my sister, my little brother, and my friends how it's important to follow the safety tips that we learned in the ATV school."

What a powerful statement! It underscores the importance of placing ATV safety in the larger context of positive youth development – a movement that provides young people with the support, the relationships, and the research-based experiential learning opportunities they need to become competent and contributing citizens.

This philosophy is the backbone of 4-H ATV safety initiatives. For instance, we emphasize youth-adult partnerships, which enable young participants to take on meaningful roles, from preparing and marketing events to actually presenting safety information. It's really no surprise that this emphasis has played a critical role in our program's success – most youth are more receptive to messages about safety when their peers deliver them.

I believe the youth development field is uniquely suited to deliver ATV safety training to young people. A 2001 national survey revealed that 85% of 4-H'ers agree or strongly agree that experience in 4-H helps them improve their decisionmaking capabilities.

Simple bans on the sale of such vehicles will not achieve the safety and education programs, the wise and careful use of the vehicles, and the reduction in injuries and fatalities we all seek. Rather, a comprehensive education and safety training program designed for the appropriate needs and the unique population of each area holds the best hope for results. Such programs will be even more effective if we continue to emphasize engaging youth as full advisors in the design, marketing, and implementation of such programs to their peers. By engaging young ATV users through such a “youth-in-governance” process, we experience increased enthusiasm, use, and effectiveness in the safety education programs local 4-H professional staff and volunteers administer. And we continue to find new – and more effective – ways for government agencies such as the CPSC to conduct their work in matters related to our nation's young people.

I encourage you to encourage the importance of education, and the effectiveness of local grass roots activities. One size does not fit all, and the changes we all seek will not come from either Washington, or our state capitals. Rather, a program designed for and relevant to the needs and interests of today's youth holds the best hope for progress in the nation's 3,067 counties. The 4-H history in ATV safety training is remarkable for its ability to reach both youth, and their parents – advocating wise and safety-conscious decisions by both groups. I hope all of us will seek ways to enhance these efforts as the most effective way to accomplish the goals of safe and proper use of ATV's.

To conclude, while regulations and legislation may be able to improve safety, they simply do not provide enough protection for our young people. Therefore, I urge the Commission to continue supporting ATV training programs based on sound youth development practices.

Senator Allen, members of the Committee, thank you again for holding this important meeting. I'll be more than happy to answer any questions, either today or at a later date.

Appendix A

The 4-H History in ATV Safety Training

In 1981, thanks to the initiative of a local 4-H agent, America's 4-H movement created an ATV Safety Program. Six months of research into the injuries and fatalities among youth riding these vehicles revealed there was no organization with curriculum or programs available to address the problem. In 1989, National 4-H Council with support provided by the Consumer Product Safety Commission and American Honda Motor Company developed a program of safety education. Four regional workshops, with representatives from 37 states, developed a nationwide network of state safety programs. Each program recognized the unique diversity of their state, the typical use of such vehicles within their state, and the appropriate safety education program. They also structured such programs to reflect the unique 4-H mission and the teaching of life skills. (4-H has always made youth-adult partnerships, and the active participation of youth key cornerstones of their programs and curricula.)

Program Description

The purpose of The National 4-H's Community ATV Safety Program is to positively influence the behavior of young people in four areas shown to increase their risk of ATV-related injuries and fatalities. These factors include:

- The use of helmets and other protective gear
- Carrying passengers
- Riding on pavement
- Riding on or alongside the road.

The 4-H program consists of a series of multi-state ATV safety workshops to train youth-adult teams on the principles of ATV safety, use of an experiential curriculum specifically designed for the youth age range of most concern and how to plan and implement safety programs at the local level. Teams usually consist of an equal number of both youth and adults. At the conclusion of these workshops, teams are encouraged to apply for grants from National 4-H Council to implement ATV safety training programs in their area. As a nonprofit organization, National 4-H Council has consistently depended on private donors to support training, curriculum development, mini-grants to communities and ongoing research.

Research

The 4-H Community ATV Safety Program has conducted ongoing research and evaluation of the program since its inception in Alaska in 1982. We have consistently been able to document an increase in the use of helmets and other protective gear and decreases in all risk behaviors identified by the CPSC. The most recent study, conducted by Halley Research, LLC, in cooperation with National 4-H Council between January 2001 and January 2003 revealed both the success of their present program and suggestions for further improvement in the future. In summary, as a result of the 4-H Community ATV Safety Program:

- Youth increased how often they wear helmets while operating ATVs.
- Youth decreased how often they carry passengers while operating ATVs.
- Youth decreased how often they ride on pavement when operating ATVs.
- Youth decreased how often they ride on or alongside the road when operating ATVs.
- Youth reduced ATV-related injuries or accidents.

THE 4-H COMMUNITY ATV SAFETY PROGRAM PROVIDES COMMUNITY-BASED GRANTS THROUGH FUNDING FROM THE SPECIALTY VEHICLE INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

2005 4-H Community ATV Safety Grant Program—Financial Summary

STATISTICS	
Number of Grants Issued	22
Geographic Impact (States)	20
Extensions Granted	6
Total Grant Funds Distributed	
	\$135,000
In-kind and Other Contributions	\$78,865
Number of Youth Involved	
	16,120
Number of Adults Involved	
	15,149
Number of Youth in Leadership Roles	
	115
Age of Youth Involved (range)	
	7-18
Number of Newspaper Articles	
	48
Number of Radio Presentations	
	13
Number of people reached with media efforts	
	498,114
Number of Speeches, Presentations and Exhibits	
	68
Projects primarily located	
	Small towns and rural areas

2006 4-H Community ATV Safety Grant Program—Financial Summary

Total Grant Funds Requested and Granted as of May 31, 2006: \$99,643

STATISTICS	
Number of Grants Issued	18
Geographic Impact (States)	16
Extensions Granted	
Total Grant Funds Distributed	
	\$99,643
Projected In-kind and Other Contributions	
	\$175,588.40
Number of Youth Involved	
Number of Adults Involved	
Number of Youth in Leadership Roles	
Age of Youth Involved (range)	
	7-18
Number of Newspaper Articles	
Number of Radio Presentations	
Number of people reached with media efforts	
Number of Speeches, Presentations and Exhibits	
Projects primarily located	