

NEWS ADVISORY



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For immediate release

BIKE LIGHTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE **Two annual events join forces for bike safety**

The City of Missoula is committed to bicyclists being safe after dark. This fall, two annual events, the Mayor's Bike Light Initiative and the Bicycle/Pedestrian Office's Lighten Up campaign, will combine to get more bike riders using lights at night.

The Lighten Up campaign will bring education and a week of focused enforcement by the Missoula Police Department and UM Campus Security through October.

The Mayor's Bike Light Initiative, now in its fifth year, puts high-quality light sets into patrol cars, giving officers an immediate solution for the cyclist who is riding dark. Officers may issue a ticket with the light set or may not, using their own judgment.

“Every year, I get dozens of calls from residents who narrowly missed a bicyclist they couldn’t see until the last second,” said Phil Smith, manager of the City’s bike/ped program. “Drivers and other riders are scared to death they’ll hit a cyclist who’s wearing dark clothes and has no illumination.”

During the past four years, local partners have helped the Mayor’s Office with the wintertime effort. They include the Missoula County DUI Task Force, The University of Montana President’s Office and Adventure Cycling, whose staff worked with the manufacturer Planet Bike to obtain lights at cost.

This year, the generosity of Alex Gallego, owner of Missoula Bicycle Works, makes the initiative possible. He obtained 180 bike light sets from Blackburn, which provided Quadrant and Mars Combo Bicycle Light sets at below cost to promote public safety, bringing the price within reach of the bike/ped program.

In addition, the City of Missoula’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Office staff will conduct a public education effort that will include flyers and posters, public service announcements and notices that they’ll hang on bicycles that lack lights.

Using lights between dusk and dawn is a personal and legal responsibility. The primary benefit of a headlight and tail light is to make the bicycle and rider visible to other drivers and bicyclists – and thus help prevent collisions. Bike lights also illuminate obstacles in the road for the bicyclists.

Bicyclists riding at night without lights can get tickets at any time during the year. However, in this expanded effort, police officers will increase their focus on bicyclists who neglect having their bikes equipped with a light. Bike lights range from very inexpensive models that make riders visible to others but don't create much illumination for the bicyclist to more expensive models that put out enough light to see clearly. Rear lights similarly vary from the bare minimum single-light or single LED to a 5-LED flashing panel. Lights are available at bicycle shops, and at other stores where bicycles are sold.

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Interview contacts:

Phil Smith, Bicycle/Pedestrian Office, 552-6352

Alex Gallego, Missoula Bicycle Works, 721-6525

Ginny Merriam, Public Information/Communications Officer, 552-6007; 546-7692