Bike Safety and the Law on E-Bikes

A Message from the *Pine Grove Police Department*
Chief Thomas J. Trotter IV

As all of you may be aware, more bicycles and electric bicycles, commonly known as **e-bikes**, are being used throughout our community. Whether riding for exercise, transportation, recreation, or simply enjoying time with family and friends, all riders have an important responsibility to operate safely and follow the law.

The Pine Grove Police Department encourages everyone to understand the rules of the road and take common-sense precautions before heading out.

Bicycles Are Vehicles on the Road

Under Pennsylvania law, bicyclists have many of the same rights and responsibilities as other roadway users. When operating on a roadway, bicyclists must obey applicable traffic laws, including traffic signals, stop signs, and right-of-way rules.

Motorists also have a responsibility to safely share the road with bicyclists. Drivers should remain alert, provide adequate space when passing, and watch carefully for bicycles when turning, entering roadways, or opening vehicle doors.

Bicyclists should ride predictably, remain aware of their surroundings, and avoid sudden movements into traffic. Visibility is especially important during early morning, evening, and nighttime hours.

Important Bicycle Safety Tips

The Pine Grove Police Department encourages riders of all ages to remember these basic safety practices:

- **Wear a properly fitted helmet.** Pennsylvania law requires bicycle helmets for riders under the age of 12. Regardless of age, helmets are strongly recommended for everyone.
- **Obey traffic signs and signals.** A bicycle rider should not ignore a stop sign or red light simply because they are not operating a motor vehicle.
- **Ride with traffic.** On roadways, bicyclists should generally travel in the same direction as other traffic.

- **Be visible.** Wear bright or reflective clothing and use required lighting and reflectors when riding at night.
- **Stay alert.** Do not use a cellphone or wear headphones in a manner that prevents you from hearing traffic and other hazards.
- **Use caution at intersections and driveways.** Many bicycle crashes occur when a vehicle and bicycle cross paths.
- **Check your equipment.** Make sure your brakes, tires, chain, steering, and lights are in safe working condition before riding.
- **Children should be supervised.** Parents and guardians should make sure young riders understand where they may safely ride and how to obey traffic rules.

Pennsylvania's E-Bike Law

E-bikes are becoming increasingly popular across Pennsylvania, but it is important for riders and parents to understand that not every electric-powered two-wheeled device is legally classified as an e-bike under state law.

In Pennsylvania, the law recognizes a category known as a **"pedal cycle with electric assist."** This classification is defined under state vehicle code and is based on specific equipment and performance standards. In general, a qualifying e-bike must have:

- Fully operable pedals
- An electric motor of **no more than 750 watts**
- A motor that assists the rider only up to certain speed limits
- A design that allows the bicycle to be operated like a traditional bicycle when the motor is not engaged

If a device does not meet these requirements, it may no longer be considered a bicycle under Pennsylvania law and could instead be classified as a motor vehicle such as a motor-driven cycle or motorcycle, which carries additional legal requirements including registration, insurance, licensing, and equipment standards.

Pennsylvania's Three-Class E-Bike System

Pennsylvania follows a widely recognized three-class system for e-bikes, which helps define how and where they may be operated:

Class 1 E-Bikes

- Pedal-assist only (motor activates only when pedaling)
- Motor assistance stops at **20 mph**
- No throttle operation

Class 2 E-Bikes

- Equipped with a throttle that can propel the bike without pedaling
- Motor assistance stops at **20 mph**
- May also include pedal-assist functionality

Class 3 E-Bikes

- Pedal-assist only (no throttle in most cases)
- Motor assistance stops at **28 mph**
- Riders must be **at least 16 years old**
- Helmet use is required for all operators, regardless of age, when operating a Class 3 e-bike

Where E-Bikes May Be Operated

Under Pennsylvania law, properly classified e-bikes are generally permitted on roadways and in bike lanes, subject to the same rules of the road that apply to traditional bicycles. However, access to sidewalks, multi-use paths, and recreational trails may vary depending on local ordinances, park regulations, or posted restrictions.

Class 3 e-bikes, in particular, may be restricted from certain shared-use paths or pedestrian areas unless specifically allowed by local authority. Riders are responsible for knowing and following all posted rules in the areas where they operate.

No License, Registration, or Insurance Required (for Qualifying E-Bikes)

One of the key distinctions under Pennsylvania law is that a properly classified e-bike does **not** require:

- A driver's license
- Vehicle registration
- Vehicle insurance

However, this exemption only applies if the device meets the legal definition of a pedal cycle with electric assist. Once a device exceeds those limits—such as higher wattage motors, increased top speeds, or motorcycle-style operation—it may fall outside the e-bike category and become subject to full motor vehicle laws.

Safety Equipment and Legal Responsibilities

Even though e-bikes are not motor vehicles under Pennsylvania law when properly classified, riders are still required to follow all applicable traffic laws, including stopping at stop signs, obeying traffic signals, and yielding the right-of-way.

Additional legal and safety requirements include:

- **Helmets:** Required for riders under 12 on all bicycles, and required for all Class 3 e-bike operators regardless of age
- **Lighting:** Bicycles and e-bikes operated at night must be equipped with a front white light and rear red reflector or light
- **Safe operation:** Reckless or careless operation that endangers others may result in citations under Pennsylvania traffic laws

Modified or High-Powered E-Bikes

A growing concern involves modified e-bikes or high-powered electric bikes that exceed legal limits. When a bicycle is altered to increase speed, remove factory limiters, or install motors beyond 750 watts, it may no longer qualify as a pedal cycle with electric assist.

In these cases, the device may be legally classified as a motor vehicle, which can require:

- Registration with PennDOT
- A valid driver's license
- Insurance coverage
- Compliance with motorcycle or motor-driven cycle equipment standards

Operating an improperly classified or modified e-bike on public roads, sidewalks, or trails can result in citations, fines, and potential vehicle impoundment.

Final Guidance from the Pine Grove Police Department

E-bikes offer a convenient and enjoyable way to travel, but they must be used responsibly and within the limits of Pennsylvania law. Riders should always take the time to understand what type of e-bike they are operating, how it is classified, and where it is legally permitted to be used.

If there is any doubt about whether a device qualifies as a legal e-bike, it is the rider's responsibility to verify its classification before operating it in public spaces.

Safe riding starts with knowledge, responsibility, and respect for the law.

Speed and Safe Operation Matter

Even when an e-bike is legally permitted, speed creates additional risks. E-bikes can accelerate quickly and travel faster than traditional bicycles. Riders must adjust their speed for conditions and remain in control at all times.

A safe speed depends on many factors, including:

- Pedestrian traffic
- Road and trail conditions
- Weather and visibility
- Intersections and driveways

- The presence of children
- Other cyclists and vehicles

Riders should never operate an e-bike recklessly or at a speed that creates a danger to pedestrians, motorists, or other members of the public.

Sidewalks, Trails, and Public Areas

Rules concerning where bicycles and e-bikes may be operated can vary depending on the type of roadway, trail, sidewalk, park, or other property involved. Riders should pay attention to posted signs and local restrictions.

Pedestrians always deserve special consideration. When operating near people walking, especially children, senior citizens, or individuals with disabilities, riders should slow down and operate with extreme caution.

Parents: Know What Your Child Is Riding

Parents should take the time to inspect and understand the type of electric bike or electric-powered device their child is using. Some devices marketed or referred to as "e-bikes" may be capable of speeds and performance far beyond those of a traditional bicycle.

Before allowing a child to operate an electric-powered bike, parents should consider:

- How fast the device is capable of traveling
- Whether it has operable pedals
- Whether it has been modified
- Where it will be operated
- Whether the rider understands traffic laws and safe riding practices
- Whether appropriate protective equipment is being used

A helmet, responsible supervision, and proper training can make a significant difference in preventing serious injuries.

E-bikes are becoming increasingly popular, but it is important to understand that not every electric-powered two-wheeled vehicle is legally considered an e-bike.

Pennsylvania law generally recognizes an **electric pedal cycle** as a bicycle equipped with operable pedals and an electric motor meeting specific legal requirement. In general, an electric pedal cycle must meet the applicable statutory limitations regarding motor power, speed capability, and weight.

A legally qualifying electric pedal cycle is generally treated differently than a motorcycle, motor-driven cycle, or other motor vehicle. However, a rider should not assume that every bike with an electric motor is automatically legal to operate as an e-bike.

Some high-powered electric bicycles, modified e-bikes, electric dirt bikes, and similar devices may fall outside the legal definition of an electric pedal cycle. Depending upon how the vehicle is designed and operated, it may be subject to registration, licensing, insurance, equipment, or other legal requirements.

If your e-bike has been modified to travel at significantly higher speeds or has features that make it more like a motorcycle or dirt bike, you should determine whether it still qualifies as an electric pedal cycle under Pennsylvania law before operating it on public roads or other public areas.

A Shared Responsibility

Bicycle and e-bike safety is a shared responsibility. Motorists must watch for cyclists. Cyclists must obey the law and operate responsibly. Parents must educate and supervise young riders. Everyone must remain alert and respect one another.

The goal of the Pine Grove Police Department is not simply enforcement—it is prevention. We want our residents, especially our young people, to enjoy riding while doing so safely and responsibly.

Before you ride, **know the law, check your equipment, wear your helmet, and remember that every trip should end with you arriving home safely.**

Ride Smart. Ride Safe. Respect the Road.

For additional information regarding Pennsylvania bicycle and electric pedal cycle laws, residents are encouraged to consult current Pennsylvania law and PennDOT guidance, as laws and regulations may change.

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