



Cyclists cop \$400k in fines

JOSH FAGAN Last updated 14:21 19/09/2014

Police have handed out \$400,000 in fines to cyclists over six months for offences like not wearing helmets through to one rider being towed by a vehicle, figures show.

Data provided to Fairfax showed police collected more than \$398,000 in fines from February to July this year.

About two thirds of infringements were for not wearing a helmet or not having a helmet fastened, while hundreds of cyclists were fined each month for not having tail lights or riding on footpaths.

Fines were also issued for more unusual offences, including four people caught riding along a motorway and one opportunistic cyclist being towed by a vehicle.

National manager of road policing Carey Griffiths said having a pushbike tied to a moving car was generally enough to warrant police attention.

"Probably lots of people try that. One person has been unlucky to be caught doing it."

Another 521 cyclists were handed \$55 fines for riding on a footpath or garden bed.

Griffiths said it was an offence for anyone - child or adult - to ride along a footpath "but it would be fair to say police take a fairly pragmatic view of that".

"If somebody's riding down Lambton Quay and weaving in and out of pedestrians they can expect to be stopped and dealt with. It's not a high priority offence for us in most situations."

The most common offence was failure to wear a helmet with 5162 infringements in six months, including more than 2200 in February and March alone.

Statistics from previous years showed similar rates of non-helmet riders - with about 8000 fines each year - but Griffiths said it was difficult to gauge whether compliance was getting better or worse.

"If we, for instance, double the number of cycle infringements tomorrow I couldn't tell you if that is because there's twice as many cyclists committing offences or if it's because we've doubled our effort."

He said there was no quota for how many fines police were instructed to issue.

"We don't set targets around numbers. We encourage our staff to see something, do something."

Griffiths said there was "understandable debate" around the helmet law but in his view, it was as important as wearing a seatbelt in a car.

Clinton Trass, of Cycling Health, said it was a "travesty" that people were fined for not wearing a helmet.

He said the high rate of infringements showed the legislation was not working and was unnecessary.

"It is otherwise normally law-abiding citizens going to work or up to the dairy. From my perspective a regulation like this only serves to discourage cyclists."

Trass and other campaigners have pushed for the helmet law to be scrapped. They have drawn some support from the ACT party, while United Future and Labour said they would both consider a review.

ACT party leader Jamie Whyte said it was an "outrageous law" and said cycling rates would lift instantly if helmet use was optional.

"What business is it of politicians whether you risk your head? It's up to you - it's your head."

He said ACT would raise the debate in Parliament if elected, and he was optimistic it would be supported.

"In theory the National party is not in favour of the nanny state so that should be easy to get through a negotiation."

National's Michael Woodhouse said they had no current plans to change the helmet law.

Stats on cycling infringements February to July 2014:

Not wearing a helmet - 5621

Helmet not securely fastened - 28

Failure to produce helmet for inspection - 28

Failure to produce helmet exemption - 2

No light on cycle - 806

No tail light - 630

No red reflector - 12

Towed by another vehicle - 1

Cycling on a motorway - 4

Cycling on a footpath or lawn garden - 521

Operating bike without brakes on both wheels - 29

Cyclist failed to ensure person carried on cycle trailer had helmet - 1

Source: New Zealand Police

- Stuff