

Safety on the roads is everyone's responsibility. We in law enforcement work very hard to get the message out about the dangers of impaired driving, wearing seat belts, and distracted driving. One aspect of highway safety that does not get as much attention is the subject of unconventional motor vehicles on public roadways. Today, consumers have many creative options when it comes to motorized transportation. Depending upon the terrain you will encounter and distance traveled, individuals may meet their transportation needs with motorize bicycles, 2 wheeled scooters, golf carts, ATVs, side-by-side ATVs, off-highway motorcycles, mini trucks, snowmobiles, electric wheel chairs and scooters, motorized foot scooters, and many others. While each of these options may have a place in a person's transportation plans, not all of them may be used on a public roadway. Even when legal to operate on a public roadway, drivers of these unconventional vehicles must drive with great care as other drivers are not always alert for the presence of these types of vehicles on or around the roads. In a crash, the potential for injuries or fatalities for drivers of unconventional vehicles is much higher due to the limited protection offered by these vehicles. Below is a summary of the laws regarding public road usage for some of the more popular unconventional vehicles. These guidelines apply to adult operators. Youth operators have more restrictive operating conditions.



ATVs

ATVs are divided into 2 classes. Class 1 ATVs are what most people think of when speaking of ATVs. These machines have a single saddle-style seat and an axle width of 50 inches or less. Class 2 ATVs are also commonly called side-by-side ATVs and have an axle width of between 50 and 65 inches. Both classes may be operated in the road right of way by individuals possessing a valid driver's license. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on the outside slope of roadways. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on the far right hand side of township roads, unless the township has an ordinance prohibiting such operation. Class 2 ATVs may be operated on the far right hand portion of the road surface on county roads, township roads, and city streets unless the road authority has an ordinance prohibiting this operation. Class 2 ATVs may not be operated on the shoulder of a state highway. Local governments may pass ordinances restricting or prohibiting the use of ATVs on their roadways. More details on ATV operations may be found at http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/rlp/regulations/ohv/ohv_regs.pdf.



Off-highway motorcycles (dirt bikes)

Off-highway motorcycles (with proper safety equipment) may be registered as a motorcycle and driven on public roadways like any other motorcycle. Off-highway motorcycles that lack this regular motorcycle

registration may only be operated on private property or designated state trails. Off-highway motorcycles may not be operated in the road right of way or ditches. More details on off-highway motorcycle operations may be found at: http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/rlp/regulations/ohv/ohv_regs.pdf



Golf carts and mini-trucks

Golf carts and mini-trucks, in general, may not be operated on public roadways. Cities, townships, and counties may pass an ordinance allowing for the operation of these vehicles on their roadways. At this time, the city of Foley is the only local government to pass an ordinance allowing the operation of golf carts on public roadways. In all other jurisdictions in Benton County, golf carts and mini-trucks may only be operated on private property.



Snowmobiles

Snowmobiles may be operated in the bottom or outside edge of road ditches. Adults born after December 31st, 1976 must obtain a snowmobile safety certificate prior to operation. Snowmobiles may be operated on the right hand portion of township roads, unless the township has an ordinance prohibiting such operation. Local governments may pass ordinances restricting or prohibiting the use of snowmobiles on their roadways. Additional information on snowmobile operation may be found at <http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/rlp/regulations/snowmobile/snowmobileregs.pdf>



Neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles

These vehicles may be operated on public roadways with speed limits of 35 MPH or less. Local governments may pass ordinances further restricting their use on public roads.



Motorized bicycles

Motorized bicycles may be operated on public roads by adults with a driver's license or motorized bicycle permit from the State of Minnesota. Motorized bicycles must operate on the far right hand side of the roadway whenever possible.



Electric wheel chairs and scooters

These mobility devices may be operated by a lone person (driver only, no passengers allowed) on a public roadway in places where a sidewalk is not present or impassible or to gain access to a motor vehicle. These mobility devices may not be operated on roads with speed limits of greater than 35 MPH.



Motorized foot scooters

Motorized foot scooters may be operated on public roadways by individuals who are ages 12 and up. Motorized foot scooters must be operated on the far right hand portion of the roadway whenever possible. Motorized foot scooters may not make left hand turns on roadways. Operators must pull over to the curb and cross the roadways as pedestrians to accomplish the left hand turn.

Anyone considering the purchase of an unconventional vehicle for use on a public roadway should consult with the local governmental unit that controls the roadway (city, township, or county) to ensure that the vehicle may be legally operated on that roadway. Anyone operating one of these unconventional vehicles on the roadway should exercise an abundance of caution to help ensure their safety on the roadways. As these vehicles become more popular and available, all drivers should also focus on watching for these vehicles to avoid accidents. Focus on driving and do your part to arrive alive.