

Reduce muddy roads, reduce collisions!

A road safety campaign is calling on the help of the farming community in its efforts to cut the number of motorcycle collisions on the north east's roads.

Operation Zenith was launched in April by Road Safety Grampian, a partnership between Grampian Police and Grampian Fire and Rescue with support from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils.

The operation seeks to educate motorcyclists by actively targeting behaviours and related offences which are linked to road traffic casualties.

Tough-talking radio adverts, targeted enforcement, 'bikesafe' training courses and new motorcycle signs are just a few of the measures that have been used in recent months to hammer home the safe riding message.

Now the campaign is targeting farmers to remind them of their responsibilities to keep roads clean of mud and other farming materials which could cause safety hazards to motorcyclists.

Head of Road Policing, Chief Inspector Ian Wallace said: "Farmers with tractors and other agricultural vehicles have to share road space with other motorists to go about their day-to-day business. As such, mud is an inevitable part of rural life and drivers should always be prepared for the unexpected.

"To motorcyclists, and motorists more generally, our advice is to keep an eye out for tractors in the fields, field and farm entrances, as well as straw and tractor tyre marks on the roads.

"If you do encounter mud on the road, be ready for more and be ready to alter your driving to suit the road conditions. Specifically, rain can result in a very slippery film of mud spread across the road and should be approached with care.

"By taking this kind of information on board, and by adjusting your driving accordingly, you can avoid being caught by surprise and serious collisions, due to skidding."

Aberdeenshire Council's Director of Transportation and Infrastructure Iain Gabriel also reminded farmers that deposits of large quantities of mud, clay or farmyard materials from vehicles can be potentially very dangerous for other road users, particularly motorcyclists.

Mr Gabriel commented: "Under the Roads Scotland Act, drivers who fail to remove the farm debris dropped onto the road as soon as practicable are committing an offence."

"I am therefore keen to remind farmers across the north east of their responsibilities in this regard and would ask them for their assistance on this important matter by clearing up any farm debris as soon as practicable."

"I would also take this opportunity to ask all road users, including farmers, to help us make our roads safer through adopting the following road safety message promoted by Operation Zenith – Look Twice... Think Bike... Think Biker."

The law states that an offence is committed if a person 'in charge of a vehicle on a road allows such quantity of mud, clay, farmyard manure or other material of whatever nature from the vehicle, or from anything carried on the vehicle, to drop onto or be deposited on the road so as to create, or be likely to create, a danger or substantial inconvenience to road users and fails to remove the material as soon as reasonably practicable.

National Farmers Union regional manager for the north east of Scotland Lorna Paterson said: "Harvesting and fieldwork are always busy times for farmers and farm workers and there may be a temptation to overlook any mud spread onto the roads or to put off doing anything about it.

"The roads authority also has the power to clear up such material and any reasonable expenses incurred in that connection is recoverable from the person committing the offence.

"To help our farmers meet any road safety concerns, NFU has established a helpline which members can call, free of charge, if they have any questions relating to agricultural vehicles on the road on 01430 431 480."

Chief Inspector Ian Wallace added: "We all have a role to play and are working together with one aim - to reduce motorcycle collisions on north east roads.

"While the measures promoted as part of Operation Zenith have concentrated on the promotion of safe riding messages to motorcyclists, this campaign requires the support of all road users for it to succeed including the farming community."

Over the past few months, Operation Zenith has introduced various measures to raise awareness about motorcyclist safety, including:

- High profile motorcycle safety awareness communications, including advice leaflets and a series of tough-talking radio adverts;
- Increased, targeted enforcement across the north-east;
- Operation of 'Bikesafe' training courses where motorcyclists can learn more about road safety, first aid, basic machine maintenance and riding skills;

- New, temporary motorcycle safety signage on routes with high casualty rates; and
- Training to local police forces on the common offences associated with motorcycles.

Further information on Operation Zenith is available by visiting www.grampian.police.uk/operationzenith.