

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE: Monday, February 21, 12:01 AM

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Child ATV deaths reached record high in 2004; Children's safety must be a priority in development of recreational trails

(February 21, Louisville, KY): According to a report released today by Kentucky Youth Advocates, 2004 was a deadly year for children riding all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). *Children and ATVs: Riding in Harm's Way* shares state data that show thirteen children, ranging in age from 4 to 16, died from injuries sustained in ATV crashes during 2004. This was the highest number of deaths in a single year since the state began collecting this data in 1984.

"Thirteen kids in our state died last year unnecessarily. If children are going to ride ATVs, we need to ensure that they are doing so in a safe manner," said Tara Grieshop-Goodwin, KIDS COUNT Coordinator at Kentucky Youth Advocates.

While the popularity of ATVs has increased in recent years, they present a serious threat to the safety of children. Over the past two decades, 105 Kentucky children under the age of 18 died from ATV crashes, and many thousands more sustained injuries.

"There is a reason that we make young people wait until 16 years of age to drive cars," says Erika Kravic, R.N., Children's Hospital Foundation Office of Child Advocacy at Kosair Children's Hospital. "Before that age, the eye-hand coordination and quick decision making skills critical to driving are just not developed enough for safe operation of any motorized vehicle."

Certain counties in the state have experienced higher numbers of child fatalities due to ATV crashes - Laurel, Ohio, Pike, and Trigg counties have each been the home to four or more children who have died in ATV crashes since 1999. Ten other Kentucky counties have had at least three children die in ATV crashes in the same time period.

Kentucky's current law requires the use of helmets when riding ATVs on public land, establishes engine size limits for youth, and prohibits riding ATVs on public roads unless for commercial purposes or to cross a highway. However, the Specialty Vehicle

Institute of America (SVIA), the trade association for ATV dealers and manufacturers, also recommends in its model state legislation prohibiting passengers on ATVs, requiring continuous adult supervision for ATV drivers under 16, and a comprehensive safety training program for all ATV operators.

“Our hope would be that the industry recommendations become a reality for Kentucky’s children,” said Lacey McNary, Policy Analyst at Kentucky Youth Advocates. “It is critical that we enforce current laws, adopt important safety protections already recommended by the industry, and ensure children’s safety remains a key part of the planning process in current efforts to develop recreational trail systems for ATV use.”

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