

As Beaufort County Reviews E-Bike Safety Rules, McDougall Law Firm Points to Rising Cyclist Injury Risks

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Following a presentation to the Beaufort County Board on e-bike safety, classification, and enforcement challenges, McDougall Law Firm, which represents injured cyclists throughout Beaufort County, says the county's review reflects a real and growing safety concern on local roads.

According to a report to the county board, a committee studying electric mobility found that state law leaves several e-bike questions unresolved, leaving local governments to weigh safety options for both urban and rural areas. Presenters told the board that heavier, faster e-bikes produce collision forces closer to motor vehicle crashes than to typical bicycle accidents.

The committee cited a marked rise in injuries tied to the devices. "Head and neck injuries have tripled since 2009, and e-bike injuries are quadrupling and have quadrupled in the last four years," a spokesperson for the committee told the board. Local officials discussed potential measures including restricting higher-speed e-bike classes from sidewalks and busy downtown corridors, requiring helmets, lights, and horns, setting speed limits on multiuse trails, and expanding safety education in schools.

Under South Carolina's current framework, e-bikes are generally divided into three classes. Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes offer pedal or throttle assistance up to about 20 miles per hour and are typically treated the same as traditional bicycles under state law. Class 3 e-bikes, which can assist riders up to roughly 28 miles per hour, occupy a less settled legal position, and officials noted that even higher-powered devices sometimes marketed as e-bikes can reach speeds closer to those of mopeds or motor vehicles. That distinction matters for where a device can legally be ridden, whether a helmet is required, and how a crash involving one may ultimately be evaluated.

The review comes amid a series of serious bicycle-related crashes in Beaufort County in recent years. In November 2024, a cyclist was killed in a collision with a passenger vehicle at the intersection of US-278 and

Gateway Village Road near Bluffton, according to local reporting from Live 5 News. In July 2026, a cyclist was killed after being struck by an SUV on Trask Parkway near Stroban Road, according to a report from ABC News 4. Both crashes remained under investigation by the South Carolina Highway Patrol at the time of reporting.

"Whether it's a traditional bicycle or a faster e-bike, drivers and riders alike are navigating roads that weren't necessarily designed with this mix of traffic in mind," said a spokesperson for McDougall Law Firm. "The county looking closely at classification and enforcement is a meaningful step, but the reality for anyone hurt on a bike today is that they're often left dealing with a driver who says they didn't see them, or a legal question about what kind of vehicle was actually involved in the crash."

Bicycle accident cases can raise specific legal questions depending on how a collision occurred, including whether a driver failed to yield the right of way, made an unsafe left-hand turn across a cyclist's path, or was distracted at the time of the crash. In South Carolina, injury claims generally must be filed within three years, though exceptions can apply depending on the circumstances of a case.

McDougall Law Firm represents injured cyclists and their families throughout Beaufort County, including areas such as Bluffton and Hilton Head Island, where a mix of pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle traffic is common along corridors like US-278 and Trask Parkway. More information about the firm's work in this area is available at mcdougalllawfirm.com/beaufort/bicycle-accident-lawyer.

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