

Cambodia college essay



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Cambodians are on the move, with more and more cars and motos taking to the streets each day. On my blog, I recently wrote about the impact of Cambodia's urban development on traffic congestion and the challenges of keeping up with the rising number of drivers. In response to my blog, Vitoureakborndidh asked, " How can Cambodians address road safety issues with more drivers on the road and respect the law? " The most troubling aspect of Cambodia's burgeoning traffic is the rise in traffic fatalities and injuries, with graphic stories about traffic accidents appearing almost daily on the front pages of the newspapers. Traffic accidents are one of the leading causes of death in Cambodia, estimated to cost the country \$310 million per year. Motorcycle accidents alone account for 75 percent of all traffic deaths.

Traffic fatalities have doubled in Cambodia over the last five years, so road safety is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently. Several factors exacerbate this upward trend in traffic fatalities. First, the roads in Cambodia were not designed to handle the high speeds at which some vehicles travel these days. While physical improvements to the road system could help, driver education and behavior modification are the keys to reducing the number of accidents.

A 2012 study by Handicap International Belgium found that less than 30 percent of Cambodian drivers understood traffic signs and the concept of speed limits. According to the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, 80 percent of motorcycle drivers do not have a driving license, and an estimated 70 percent of automobile drivers illegally purchased their driving licenses from a private driving school. I also read recently that only six

percent of commercial freight vehicles can pass Cambodia's road safety inspections. Education and enforcement efforts to address these troubling facts would go a long way toward helping the country reduce traffic accidents. Another factor contributing to the high number of traffic deaths is people failing to wear a helmet while riding a moto. While I was in Siem Reap last month, I witnessed a frightening motorcycle accident in which a family of four was thrown off a motorcycle after it collided with a cart that suddenly pulled in its path.

Thankfully, every family member got up and walked away from the accident - virtually unharmed - because they were each wearing a helmet. In contrast, my friend witnessed an accident in which three boys were thrown off their motorcycle. The driver was wearing a helmet and was able to walk away from the accident, but the other two boys, who were not wearing helmets, suffered serious head injuries. These two cases clearly demonstrate the value of wearing a helmet, which protects the head from injury and can save someone's life in an accident.

During my time here, I have been encouraged by the increasing number of motorcycle drivers wearing a helmet. Less than 10 percent of passengers, however, do so. According to the Asia Injury Prevention (AIP) Foundation, 148 children in Cambodia were killed in traffic accidents in 2011, and almost half of these deaths were caused by head injuries. As a parent, I care very much about children and their safety. When I taught my children how to ride their bicycles, the very first thing I emphasized was the importance of always wearing a helmet.

In collaboration with AIP, the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched the Helmets for Kids program last year, which provided over 500 young Cambodian students with helmets to help protect them during their daily commutes to and from school by bicycle or motorcycle. I would like to commend Prime Minister Hun Sen and the National Assembly for initiating draft laws to promote road safety and helmet use.

The government plays a crucial role in traffic safety by ensuring all vehicle operators obtain a driver's licenses and enforcing traffic laws. Civil society, the news media, the private sector, and private citizens also have a role to play by raising awareness of and following good practices like wearing a helmet, not drinking and driving, and driving at safe speeds. Having safe roads is vital to every country's development, allowing citizens easier access to schooling, healthcare, and work, while providing businesses and farmers with the means to get products to markets efficiently. As Cambodia's economy continues to grow, the country will also need to continue addressing the challenges of traffic and road safety.