



Are Your Stormwater Grates Safe For Bicyclists?

... by Kelly Heavey



As a bicyclist pedals over a storm grate on the edge of the road, he or she could be in danger if the grate is not designed with bicycling in mind. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation in *Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety*, "courts have become less sympathetic to agencies that do not consider the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists."

Agency attention should be focused on making the roadway as safe as possible for every user. Drain grates used to be designed with bars running parallel to the direction of traffic, which bike tires slipped into, pitching the rider off the handlebars. Safety problems also occur if the drain grate is raised from or sunken into the road.

Lawsuits across the country have resulted from situations such as these. In 2001 *The Urban Transportation Monitor* reported that cities and counties face 2 to 3 road-related lawsuits per year, with an average settlement for each at \$230,000, not including defense fees. To head off lawsuits regarding storm grates, at least one state (Oregon) has passed a statute prohibiting the installation of storm grates that pose a danger to bicyclists.

"Bicycle-safe" storm grate designs that can replace outdated and dangerous drain grates.

California uses a honeycomb pattern. Kansas DOT's Bureau of Design uses its "inlet manhole special" design and adds a grate manufactured by Neenah Foundry (www.nfco.com) or a similar product.

Honeycomb design



Some other suggestions for quick fixes for dangerous grates are to place a cover over the top of the grate with steel straps or to paint warning markings on the street.

Sources:

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety. "Tort Liability and Risk Management." U.S. DOT, <http://www.tfhr.gov/safety/pedbike/pubs/05085/chapt22.htm>

Basic Improvements for Bicyclists, by John Williams, <http://www.bikeplan.com/locond21.pdf>.

Oregon Statute Makes Dangerous Storm Drains Illegal. Swanson Thomas & Coon, http://www.stc-law.com/storm_drain.html.

Reference: KUTC Newsletter Fall 2007