

National Workshop: 85% helmets used by riders unsafe: Manufacturers

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More than 85% of helmets used by two-wheeler riders across India do not meet ISI standards, helmet manufacturers claimed on Tuesday, saying the market was flooded with sub-standard products that compromise on safety despite a fourth of all road deaths in the country involving two-wheeler occupants.

Major helmet manufacturers raised this issue at the national road safety workshop for vulnerable road users – pedestrians, cyclists and two-wheelers – held in the capital on Tuesday.

“There are no more than 100 manufacturers of ISI-approved helmets in the country, although non-ISI helmet makers number a couple of thousands. The estimated demand for helmets is around 90 million pieces per annum while the total capacity of ISI helmets is not more than 10 million pieces,” claimed Rajeev Kapoor, managing director Steelbird Helmets in his presentation made at the workshop.

According to market reports, roughly 13 million two-wheelers were sold in India in 2010. Though officials of the road, transport and highways ministry, which organized the workshop, said that there is no study or research about the total number of ISI-marked helmets vis-à-vis the ordinary ones, there is no doubt that poor quality helmets – also known as plastic helmets – are found all over the country.

A senior ministry official admitted that though there is a “Helmet Action Committee” at the Centre little has been done so far. Moreover, the Motor Vehicle Act is silent on the wearing of helmet. “It only mentions that rider should “wear protection”. So wearing of helmet has not been made compulsory. There is no research on the helmet crash standard and whether the existing ‘certified’ ones are fit for the tropical standard,” he added.

The latest World Health Organization report on road accidents across the globe mentions noncompliance of helmet wearing – it includes poor quality - as one of the key reasons of increasing road deaths in developing countries. “But

nothing has been done. There is no research in India to have a helmet that can fit to our weather condition so that people feel comfortable wearing them. The ISI standard has been copied from Europe and doesn't fit to our needs. Vietnam customized the helmets in 2010 and there is 90% compliance," said Rohit Baluja, member of UN's Global Road Safety Collaboration.

Even trauma care experts blame inadequate legislation and poor enforcement for the noncompliance of helmet norms in the country. "People don't wear helmet and if they wear the quality is not good. Women and children don't wear helmet. This is despite the fact that 30-40% of injuries we get at hospitals are head injuries," M C Misra chief of AIIMS Trauma Centre.