

# GENERAL RESEARCH

*Mike Lewis*

## Introduction

One of the most difficult tasks facing any Motorcyclists' Rights Organization (MRO) is the gathering, compiling and interpreting of information for use in presenting "our" case to legislators, the media or the public. There exists today an overwhelming amount of research data and narrative from studies and records that are kept in a multitude of locations. Many motorcyclists are unaware of the resources available to them in gathering this information.

There are usually no dark secrets to acquiring what you need. Instead the trick is to be persistent; write, call, visit, and continue to ask for what you want. The most frustrating part of any battle is to find, too late, that your opponents have more ammunition than you. This paper is an attempt to provide some general guidance for locating information sources and methods of obtaining that information.

## Stop Reinventing the Wheel

Many of us belong to one or more Motorcyclists' Rights Organizations. It makes no difference whether it is the MRF, ABATE, AMA, or any of the other rights or riders groups. Each of these organizations has within its ranks a wealth of experienced people and scores of comparative data and evaluations that are available for the asking. A tremendous amount of effort has already been expended by these groups to compile this data. It is counterproductive to retrace the steps already made by others, so take advantage of this material.

Start early and contact the appropriate local, state or regional MRO office to get what you need. Even if you do not find exactly what you are looking for, there is usually someone who knows someone who has the answer. Besides, who better to get good ammunition from than your fellow riders. Along this line a suggestion to all Motorcyclists' Rights Organizations: a national electronic bulletin board to which all MROs could contribute position papers, legislative strategies,

tactics, and lessons learned would go a long way to reducing duplication of effort.

## State and Federal Freebies

As a Viet Nam Vet I learned many lessons about warfare. Protecting your rights is warfare. Make no mistake about it. It is a basic rule of guerilla warfare to use your enemy's weapons to defeat him. The State and Federal governments have many agencies i.e. Department of Transportation, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, General Accounting Office, Motor Vehicle Administration, Emergency Medical Services, Departments of Health and Human Services, States Attorney's Office, Attorney General's Office, State Insurance Commissioners, and the list goes on and on.

Each of these agencies pays for reports, studies and compilations of data from every imaginable source. Most of this data comes back at us in the form of negative recommendations that our opponents use to legislate against or restrict our freedoms. These agencies typically make the bulk of these reports available free for the asking. Contact the appropriate agency and ask them for a catalog of reports or data. The State Police or Highway Patrol are also an excellent source of very credible statistics relating to accidents. Senators, Congressmen, Representatives, Delegates, and other elected officials have staff people who do research for them.

Requesting your elected officials to provide you with the data that made them support a certain position is a way to see how the opposition presented its case and permits you the opportunity to rebut their information. This approach makes use of the opposition's ammunition to your advantage or lets a friendly politician do some of your leg work for you. Make them think you need their help to be better informed. Politicians are typically very willing to provide information to their constituents.

Your local telephone book can start you on your way to getting in touch with the government

and its ammunition. Once you get what you need, analyze it, pick it apart, and use it to your advantage. Share it with your friends and other MROs. Our best weapon is information.

## Ask the Librarian

Stop in at the local library. A friendly librarian can be more valuable than you can imagine. If you do not already have a library card, get one. Visit the library and get to know one of the librarians. Ask them to help you find an article on some current legislative or safety issue. They are the research experts who can help you get the facts you need.

The reference sections contain books that list organizations, addresses, and everything you might ever want to know about a given group. You can also find State and Federal directories that list addresses and phone numbers. Consult the Readers Guide to Periodicals for magazine articles and writers that focus on specific issues. Many libraries are starting to make use of CD-ROM databases that contain information that is retrievable by subject, author, title or key word. There are even books that tell you How to Find ....Almost Anything. Whatever the subject, the library should be one of your first stops. And once again, it is a free service. You pay for it with your taxes; so make use of it.

## Business is Business

Many of the groups that want to impose their will upon your lifestyle are in the business of profiting from your activities. Insurance companies, for example, keep some of the most detailed records and statistics in the world. With a little effort you can contact these companies and request accident data, medical expense information, risk assessments and much more. Note that not all insurance companies are willing to share this information freely. You may need the assistance of a friendly insurance agent if a company is being difficult.

Numerous trade and business groups also compile statistics about our sport. The Motorcycle Industry Council provides an annual report that is excellent. Dealers Associations offer another possible source of information. Manufacturers of

specific products such as helmets can also provide data. There are technical specialists and professionals who provide consulting in structures, accident investigation, lobbying, legal opinions, statistical analysis, and many other fields. Identify the type of specialized information you need and contact one of these experts. There are some very good folks out there who might help out "pro bono" if you ask. Some very specialized trade papers, legal information services and product information exist, but are costly to access. These sources are best pursued through the trade and professional sources or libraries. Remember to check within your MRO membership for professionals who can help with the research.

## Academia

Many universities throughout the country receive grants to do research. Most of this work (reports, studies and papers) is available upon request. We have already confronted many of these reports in our battles to maintain our freedoms. Not all of these research studies are unfavorable. The trick is to discredit the bad studies and use to our full advantage the good ones.

There are many college students throughout the country who have to do research papers and master's theses in political science, social science, statistical analysis, medical, legal, industrial, business, and engineering disciplines. Perhaps one or more of these students can be persuaded to address some of our issues and do their papers on motorcycle related subjects. Visit a local college or state university and discuss the approach with one or more of the senior faculty. They may be receptive to your ideas and put some talented young researcher to task on our issues. If we do not ask, we may never get some of these folks to produce the type of fair assessment we so often wish were available for our use.

## The Media

To many motorcycle riders the second lowest life-form on the face of the earth is a reporter. They would not know the truth if you hit them with it. No matter what you say to them, it always seems to get misquoted or subverted. Regardless of the feelings about the media, one point is of value.

The media does conduct research on an issue and then prints its findings. The media is a source of information that you must deal with on a regular basis, more often than not in the form of damage control.

Media reports are typically the only information that the public hears on an issue. Accurate or not, we spend a great deal of our time addressing what the media says about motorcyclists and our issues. It is therefore important that the MROs keep good tabs on the media and make use of the media data for rebuttal or support as needed.

No article or aired report should pass by without a copy or a report of viewing being logged in at the MRO. The information that the media presents is something that all MROs must gather and assess for usage.

## Foundations and Societies

MRO members should always be on the lookout for new sources of information. Keep an eye on the various Foundations, Societies, Councils, and Academies as possible information suppliers. These groups gather data, publish papers and lobby for their special interests much like the MROs. If your MRO does not currently check with these groups for research information, seek out a volunteer to snoop these sources. It is also a good idea to canvass the membership for anyone who is a member of these societies or groups and has an inside track on the information.

## What Now, Coach?

Assuming that your quest for information is successful, what do you do with the information? First, make copies and share it with the other members of your MRO who are working whatever issue you researched. Document the source for future reference. Retain a master copy on file with the MRO main office. Analyze the information and, if useful, put it to work for you in a briefing paper, press release or other medium that suits your MROs particular needs.

Lastly, share the information with other MROs. Your research might be the key piece that helps another group of riders preserve or win back their freedom.

## Remember

Leave no stone unturned. Use whatever is available. Do not be afraid to ask for help.

It is easier to have someone else do the leg work, particularly when they know what they are doing. Just because you do not like the source, do not be afraid to use the information. Be sure to validate the accuracy of your information. One thing MROs pride themselves on is their credibility. Your information may not always sway someone else to your point of view but accuracy and credibility are a must. Good luck with your research and always defend your freedom.