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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-418](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

All-terrain vehicles (ATV), which are off-road motorized vehicles, usually with four tires, a straddle seat for the operator, and handlebars for steering control, have become increasingly popular. However, ATV fatalities and injuries have increased over the last decade and are a matter of concern to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (Commission), which oversees ATV safety, and to others. Many ATV crashes involving children occur when they are riding adult-sized ATVs. Manufacturers and distributors have agreed to use their best efforts to prevent their dealers from selling adult-sized ATVs for use by children under the age of 16.

The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act requires GAO to report on (1) how ATVs are used and the advantages of their use and (2) the nature, extent, and costs of ATV crashes. GAO addressed these topics by reviewing ATV use and crash data and by discussing these issues with Commission staff, industry officials, user groups, and safety stakeholders.

What GAO Recommends

Among other things, GAO recommends that Commission staff resume undercover checks of dealers to check their willingness to sell adult-sized ATVs to children and consider how to enhance the agency's ability to prevent the sale of adult-sized ATVs for use by children. The Commission agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-10-418](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Susan Fleming at (202) 512-2834 or flemings@gao.gov.

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES

How They Are Used, Crashes, and Sales of Adult-Sized Vehicles for Children's Use

What GAO Found

ATVs are mainly used for recreation, but are also used in occupations such as farming and policing. According to a 2008 industry survey of ATV owners, 79 percent use them for recreation and 21 percent use them for work or chores. ATVs are also used as primary transportation in some remote communities, such as in parts of Alaska. GAO found little information that quantified the advantages of ATV use. However, users surveyed in 2008 said that riding provides them with personal enjoyment, allowing them, for example, to view nature and spend time with their families. In addition, trail managers and local business officials in areas of the country where trails have been established, such as West Virginia, said the surrounding communities have benefited economically from spending by ATV riders.

Injuries and fatalities increased substantially during the last decade, but not as rapidly as the number of ATVs in use, which nearly tripled. According to Commission staff, an estimated 816 fatalities occurred in 2007—the agency's most recent annual estimate—compared with 534 in 1999, a 53 percent increase. However, from 1999 through 2005—the most recent period for which fatality estimates are complete—the risk decreased from 1.4 deaths per 10,000 four-wheeled ATVs in use to 1.1 deaths per 10,000 ATVs in use, or 21 percent. Regarding injuries, an estimated 134,900 people were treated in emergency rooms for ATV-related injuries in 2008, compared with about 81,800 in 1999, a 65 percent increase. However, the estimated risk of an emergency room-treated injury per 10,000 four-wheeled ATVs in use decreased from 193 injuries per 10,000 four-wheeled ATVs in use to 129.7 injuries in 2008, or 33 percent. About one-fifth of the deaths and about one-third of the injuries involved children. Crashes involving children frequently occurred when they rode adult-sized ATVs, which are more difficult for them to handle. Manufacturers and distributors have agreed to use their best efforts to prevent their dealers from selling adult-sized ATVs for use by children, but recent GAO undercover checks of selected dealers in four states indicated that 7 of 10 were willing to sell an adult-sized ATV for use by children. Commission staff suspended similar checks in early 2008 because of higher priorities. Commission staff have estimated that the costs of ATV injuries and fatalities more than doubled during the last decade from about \$10.7 billion in 1999 to \$22.3 billion in 2007 (in 2009 dollars). Safety stakeholders, including industry officials, said that ATV injuries could be reduced through training and wearing proper equipment such as helmets.

ATVs Being Used for Recreation, for Medical Transportation, and Farming



Source: GAO; Southeast Region Emergency Services Council, Inc.; (reprinted with permission); National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.