

**Statement of
Chairman Jacqueline Jones-Smith
on the Bicycle Helmet Petition
July 31, 1991**

Each year approximately 1,200 cyclists are killed, and more than half a million bicycle-related injuries are treated in hospital emergency rooms. Most of the deaths, some 70%, are due to head trauma and about 30% of the injuries are to the head or face. We can prevent a great number of these tragedies by increasing bike helmet use.

Studies have shown that bicycle helmets can reduce head injuries by up to 85%. Yet, only 6.3% of all cyclists wear helmets. One of the primary challenges of bicycle safety is that of encouraging cyclists to wear bicycle helmets.

The Commission has had a continuing interest in bicycle safety and the further reduction of injuries and deaths. Because of the importance of this safety issue, I voted, as a matter of policy, to docket the submission by the Consumer Federation of American, et al. as a petition, even though it did not meet the regulatory requirements, in order to review the bicycle helmet issue and have the benefit of a full Commission briefing.

Upon review, I believe the staff recommendation to deny the petition is sound. Under 16 C.F.R. 1051.9, one of the factors to be considered by the Commission in deciding to grant or deny a petition is whether the product involved presents an unreasonable risk of injury. The facts do not indicate that a bicycle helmet, a piece of safety equipment, poses an unreasonable risk of injury. There is no data to show that helmets currently available do not adequately protect cyclists from head injuries. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that helmets are effective in reducing head injuries and that a rider has an increased risk of serious head injury or death if he/she rides without a helmet.

By denying this petition the Commission is not, by any means, abandoning its interest in bicycle helmet safety. The CPSC staff has been working on a comprehensive bicycle project to assess bicycle hazards and develop strategies for injury reduction. The agency will work on improving bicycle helmets. The issue of whether different standards and different test methods may be appropriate for children's helmets has not been resolved. Significant work in this area is now being done by private laboratories and voluntary standards groups, however.

If sufficient new information becomes available the Commission could, on its own, initiate action that could lead to a mandatory standard. Interested parties may also refile if new information becomes available and I encourage them to do so.

The Commission shares the same goal as the groups who filed the bicycle helmet petition -- to increase the use of bicycle helmets which are effective in reducing serious head injury. Studies show that bicycle helmets, which can reduce head injuries by up to 85%, are effective. With only a little over 6% of bicyclists wearing helmets, it is clear the more pressing challenge is to increase helmet use. The Commission has and will continue to work cooperatively with all parties interested in these matters.