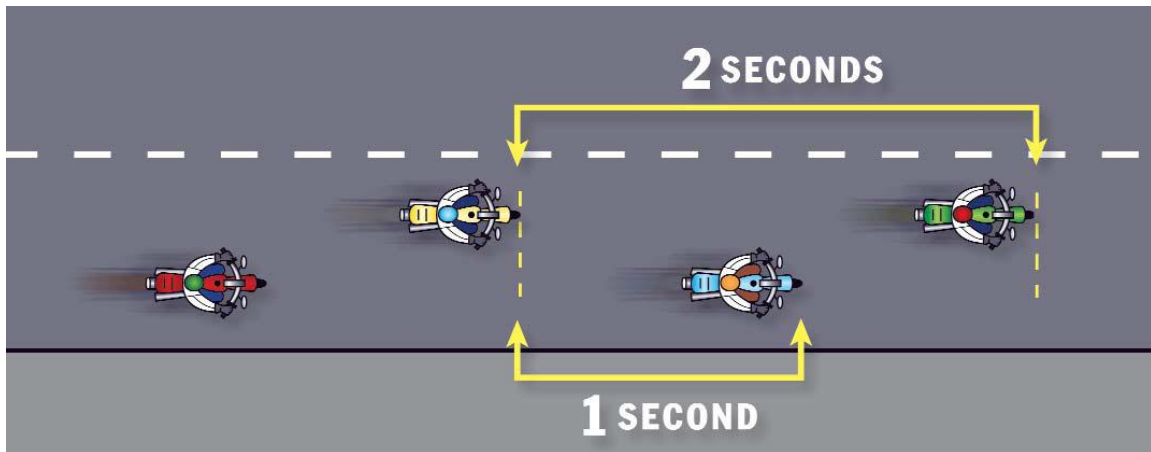# Why We Need The Staggered Formation

An unfortunate thing happed last week in Northern Oregon: a group of 30 riders were traveling on I-5 between Portland and Salem when they encountered stop and go traffic. At some point during the ride traffic came to a complete stop and there was a mass collision among the bikes. Twenty bikes were involved and 10 went down. It was a nice day with dry pavement, so the only apparent reason was that they were following too closely to the cars in front and to each other, and they weren't paying close enough attention to their environment.

As you all know, the recommended spacing of motorcycles in a group is to be 2 seconds behind the bike immediately in front of you and 1 second behind the bike diagonally in front of you. This is done to give you sufficient time to react if something happens.

This also implies that you stay in your track and don't move from side to side in the lane. The obvious exception to this is when you have to move to avoid a problem (pothole, gravel, bodies, etc.) Hopefully, these problems will be pointed out by the lead bike.

A single-file formation is preferred on a curvy road, under conditions of poor visibility or poor road surfaces, entering/leaving highways, or other situations where an increased space cushion or maneuvering room is needed.

Avoid side-by-side formations, as they reduce the space cushion. If you suddenly needed to swerve to avoid a hazard, you would not have room to do so. You don't want handlebars to get entangled.

Periodically check the riders following in your rear view mirror. If you see a rider falling behind, slow down so they may catch up. If all the riders in the group use this technique, the group should be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without pressure to ride too fast to catch up. Large gaps between riders may tempt cars to slip inside the group on multi-lane highways, especially when they are passing on the right.

A nice tight formation might look great, but can cause problems if the unexpected happens, so be aware…