

## HIRING AN ATTORNEY FOR A MOTORCYCLE CASE

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Okay, so you've been injured in a motorcycle accident, and you feel it is the other driver's fault. You're just home from the hospital, and you are starting to get calls from the other driver's insurance adjuster. Like most people who have never been injured in an accident before, it may be that you've never had the need to hire an attorney for anything, much less something as important as handling your accident claim properly. And unless you have an existing relationship with a good lawyer who can either represent you or refer you to a qualified lawyer who can, the process of hiring one can be confusing and frustrating. How should you go about it? Here are a few suggestions.

**“What kind of lawyer do I need? There are so many different kinds. Which kind is best for my case?”**

You need a lawyer who is well-versed in representing plaintiffs in personal injury cases. Many firms practice what is called “insurance defense” law, meaning that they only represent insurance companies against people who have been injured. You are looking for the lawyers on the other side – the lawyers who represents the claimants (otherwise known as the “plaintiffs” if and when a lawsuit is filed).

**“Where do I look for one?”**

If you have a good existing relationship with a family lawyer, you may wish to start there. If your lawyer doesn't practice in this area, he or she may know several well-qualified lawyers in your area to whom he or she can refer you. If they value their relationship with you, good lawyers will likely steer you to someone you can trust to handle your case properly.

Another approach is to call your local county bar association, or to check out some of the more prominent attorney listing sites on the web, such as [www.lawyers.com](http://www.lawyers.com) or [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com). Bear in mind though, that in the case of the local bar association, the only criteria for being listed in the referral service is usually that they be a dues-paying member. Similarly, the only criteria for being listed on the big attorney search websites is to pay some hefty annual subscription fees. That doesn't mean that good lawyers can't be found on these sites, but it does mean that you shouldn't put much stock solely in the fact that attorneys are listed there.

A third approach is to use Google to search for personal injury or motorcycle accident lawyers in your town or county. Once you've identified a few lawyers who have a strong presence on the web, take a good look at their sites to get a feel for what they have to tell you. If their sites contain helpful information you can use about personal injury law, the process, and their approach to representing their clients, that is a good sign, and you can use that information to make a decision about whether to schedule a meeting with them.

On the other hand, many attorney websites are simply online versions of the cheesy full page ads that we talked about earlier, with big color photos of bad car crashes, trumpeting "millions recovered," etc. If the site does nothing but tell you how great the lawyer is, I suggest you take that into consideration as well. That's because, in my opinion, the lawyers who have the strongest credentials usually don't have to focus so much on trumpeting their accomplishments because they already have more business than they can (or want) to handle. Typically, those lawyers are more interested in informing and helping their potential clients make sound choices and prudent decisions about how to pursue their claims.

### **"When should I hire an attorney?"**

Depending on the circumstances of your case, you may not need to hire a lawyer at all. As we said above in Chapter 8, if your medical bills and property damages are relatively low, you may be better off either trying to settle the matter yourself, or paying a reasonable consulting fee to an attorney for some helpful advice to guide you through the process.

If your bills and damages are more substantial however (and if you've been in a bad motorcycle wreck the chances are strong that they are), you are well advised at least to meet with a few attorneys *as soon as possible* after the accident. Earlier is definitely better, so that you don't end up making serious mistakes that could damage or even crater your claim. You also will want to preserve meaningful evidence and obtain witness statements as soon as possible so that they are both available and reliable should you need them to support your claim down the road.

### **"Okay, I've located few firms that look promising through recommendations from former clients or through careful use of the web. What do I do next?"**

Well, call them up, and ask for an appointment so that you may come in to discuss your case. Many, if not most attorneys handling personal injury accident cases will not charge you for this "initial consultation," but you should ask up front when you call to be sure. Reputable lawyers should welcome the opportunity to speak with you in a relaxed, professional manner. Draw up a list of questions that you want to ask, and take notes. After you have spoken with a few lawyers, the chances are you will have a pretty good idea of which firm – and attorney – is the right one to handle your case.

Who you hire is, of course, ultimately a personal decision based upon your own diligent research and your basic, gut-level impression of the lawyers you speak with. To assist you, in the next two chapters I've put together some thoughts and suggestions on the "dos" and "don'ts" of hiring a personal injury attorney, and some important questions that you may wish to ask.