



PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS



Fifty years ago when traffic volumes were much lower than they are today, pedestrians could take their cues from the same traffic lights as motorists. Traffic conditions are more complex today, so it shouldn't be surprising that questions are frequently asked about pedestrian signals, which were introduced to improve pedestrian safety.



WHY ARE PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS AVAILABLE AT SOME INTERSECTIONS AND NOT AT OTHERS?

Pedestrian signals are installed for two main reasons: a high volume of foot traffic at an intersection or the signals directing motorists don't meet the needs of pedestrians.

For example, some intersections are laid out at odd angles, and traffic signals can't be seen by pedestrians. In other cases, turning and merging lanes make intersections so complex that special provisions must be made for pedestrians.

SHOULDN'T PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS BE AVAILABLE AT EVERY INTERSECTION? WOULDN'T THAT MAKE THINGS SAFER?

If existing traffic signals meet the needs of people on foot—the signals are easy to see and provide plenty of time to cross safely—there is no need for pedestrian signals. Pedestrian signals won't improve safety in such cases, and are costly to purchase, install and operate.

However, it is generally the policy of the City to install pedestrian signals at all traffic signals where pedestrians are permitted to cross the street.

WHY ARE THE WORDS "WALK" AND "DON'T WALK" BEING REPLACED BY SYMBOLS?

Transportation engineers would-wide are moving toward the use of symbol signs in place of word signs because they are easier for people to comprehend in a shorter amount of time. Easily recognized symbols also accommodate people who can't read English.

In case of pedestrian signals, both word and symbol signs are currently in use. Here's what they mean:

Walk or **walking pedestrian symbol** means you may begin crossing.

A **flashing** or **steady Don't Walk** or an **upraised hand symbol** means it's too late to begin crossing. Don't enter the street but finish crossing if you have already started.

WHY DOES IT ALWAYS SAY “DON’T WALK” BEFORE I’VE COMPLETED CROSSING THE STREET?

The flashing don’t walk or upraised hand is a warning to people who have not yet entered the intersections that it’s too late to safely cross the street before the traffic signal changes allowing cars to proceed. Signals are timed to allow plenty of time for people who have already started walking to safely cross the street.

IS IT REALLY NECESSARY FOR ME TO PUSH A BUTTON TO ACTIVATE THE PEDESTRIAN SIGNAL?

CAN’T I JUST WAIT FOR THE LIGHT TO CHANGE?

Where buttons are available to pedestrians, it’s because the traffic signal is timed for cars, not for people on foot. If you do not activate the pedestrian signal by pushing the button, the traffic light won’t give you enough time to safely cross the street. You need to push the button once for it be activated.

CAN I COUNT ON A SAFE CROSSING IF I CAREFULLY FOLLOW THE PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS?

The following suggestions are offered in the interest of pedestrian safety:

- ◇ Cross every intersection defensively.
- ◇ When crossing the street, regardless of the availability of signals, cross as quickly as possible.
- ◇ Always watch for turning vehicles. You have the legal right to be there, but that doesn’t protect you from the carelessness of some motorists.



REQUESTS AND INQUIRES

If you have any questions, requests or suggestions concerning pedestrian signals or traffic in general, please call the Engineering Division of the Public Works Department at **(760) 337-5182** or submit your request via the Online Request for City Service Form.