

Pedestrian Signals



Traffic Engineering
Department

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Description:

Many years ago when traffic volumes were much lower than they are today, pedestrians could take their cues from the same traffic lights as motorists. Things are more complicated today, so it should not be surprising that questions are frequently asked about pedestrian signals, which were introduced to improve pedestrian safety. Some frequently asked questions are:

- Why do they always tell me to stop before I get across the street?
- Pedestrian signals used to say “walk” or “don’t walk”. What do the new symbols mean?
- How do I cross safely?
- What is that chirping noise at some traffic signals?



Why does it always flash at me 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 intersection. The flashing “don’t walk” signal means that it’s too late to safely start to cross the street. Signals are timed to allow plenty of time for people who have already started walking to safely cross the street.



(Steady)
START CROSSING Watch for turning cars.



(Flashing)
DON'T START
Finish crossing if you are in the crosswalk. Opposing traffic still has a red light.



(Steady)
Means **DON'T CROSS**
PEDESTRIANS should not be in the crosswalk.

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 don't activate the pedestrian signal by pushing the button, the traffic light may not give you enough time to safely cross the street. You only need to push the button once for it to be activated.

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Why are the words "WALK" and "DON'T WALK" being replaced by symbols?

Transportation engineers world 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 don't read English.

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



(Steady)
START CROSSING
Watch for turning cars.



(Flashing)
DON'T START
Finish crossing if you are in the crosswalk. Opposing traffic still has a red light.



(Steady)
Means DON'T CROSS.
Pedestrians should not be in the crosswalk



Some signals are also equipped with count down timers that let pedestrians already crossing know how much time remains until the traffic signal begins to cycle.

Can I count on a safe crossing if I carefully follow the pedestrian signals?

The signals assign your legal rights in the intersection however, it is important to be cautious when crossing busy intersections.

The following suggestions are offered in the interest of safety:

- Cross intersections defensively.
- When crossing the street, regardless of the availability of signals, cross as quickly as possible. Minimize your time in the roadway.
- 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.

What is that "chirping/tweeting" and/or "cu-coo" noise at the pedestrian signals?

The primary technique that pedestrians who have visual disabilities use to cross streets at signalized locations is to initiate their crossing when they hear the traffic in front of them stop and the traffic alongside them begin to move, corresponding to the onset of the green interval. This technique is effective at many signalized locations.

At some locations this technique is supplemented with devices that emit the "chirp" noise when it is time to begin (and continue) crossing. These devices are typically installed after a request is made and an engineering study is conducted on the intersection to determine their need.

If you need further information please call the Traffic Engineering Department at:

925-931-5650