

MARKED CROSSWALKS

We would like to give you an idea of the engineering knowledge and experience which your Street Department must consider when evaluating the need for traffic control measures. Arriving at the best solution for each situation calls for judgment combined with engineering knowledge and experience.

What are the official guidelines?

The Department follows Agency policies and the Revised Code of Washington (RCW or State Law). The RCW's require us to follow the national guidelines outlined in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Traffic control devices include signal lights, traffic signs, and paint markings. The MUTCD covers all aspects of the placement, construction and maintenance of every form of approved traffic control. The guidelines prescribe five basic requirements of all devices. They must: fulfill a need, command attention, convey a clear simple meaning, command respect of road users, and give adequate time for proper response. The MUTCD emphasizes "uniformity" of traffic control devices. A uniform device conforms to the regulations for dimensions, color, wording and graphics. The standard device should convey the same meaning at all times. Consistent use of traffic control devices protects the clarity of their messages. As stated in the MUTCD, "uniformity" must also mean treating similar situations in the same way.

How are crosswalks defined and used?

Washington State law says that crosswalks exist at all intersections except where prohibited by posted signs. At any crosswalk (marked or unmarked) drivers must yield the right of way to pedestrians.

Crosswalks are marked to encourage pedestrians to use a particular crossing. The MUTCD states: "**Crosswalk markings should not be used indiscriminately.**" Studies conducted on the relative safety of crosswalks support minimal installation of marked crosswalks. The City of San Diego studied intersections at which there were both marked and unmarked crosswalks. The results were surprising. Although 2 ½ times as many people used the marked crosswalks, 6 times as many accidents occurred in the marked crosswalks. A pedestrian safety study in Long Beach, California reported 8 times as many accidents in marked crosswalks compared to unmarked crosswalks. Such research suggests that a marked crosswalk can give pedestrians a false sense of security. At all crosswalks, both unmarked and marked, it is the pedestrians responsibility to be cautious and alert while crossing.

Where would we normally mark crosswalks?

Crosswalks should be marked at intersections where there is substantial conflict between vehicle and pedestrian movements, where significant pedestrian concentrations occur, or where pedestrians could not otherwise recognize the proper place to cross. Examples of such locations are: approved school crossings and signalized intersections where there is significant pedestrian traffic and one or more crossing locations have been prohibited.

These examples follow the philosophy of marking crosswalks as a form of encouragement. In the first case, we are encouraging school children to use a crossing which is normally being monitored. In the second case, we are encouraging all pedestrians to avoid a prohibited crossing. Painted crosswalks should only be used where necessary to direct pedestrians along the safest route.