

Safety tips for walkers and bikers

Within the last few weeks I have been approached by several citizens with suggestions and concerns about walkers and bikers on the roadways, especially at night. There have been concerns about walkers/bikers wearing dark colored clothing at night, walking/biking in the middle of the roadway or weaving from one side to the other, and even concerns about people walking animals on long leashes and having some close calls as walkers are not able to control their animals when cars pass them by. I have compiled a list of hints and tips for everyone to review and hopefully stay a little bit safer.

. Walk Facing Traffic When Walking on the Side of the Road

If there is no sidewalk and you must walk on the side of the road, choose the side where you are facing oncoming traffic. In North America, this is the left side of the road. This gives you the best chance to see traffic approaching closest to you and take evasive action when needed. This may be confusing because the opposite rule is true for cyclists, who cycle in the same direction as the traffic flow.

Be Visible

Wear bright colors when walking in daytime. When walking at night, wear light-colored clothing and reflective clothing or a reflective vest to be visible. Carry a flashlight. Drivers are often not expecting walkers to be out after dark, and you need to give them every chance to see you, even at street crossings that have crossing signals. Be just as cautious at dawn or twilight, as drivers still have limited visibility or may even have the setting or rising sun directly in their eyes

.• Cross streets at a corner, using traffic signals where available and crosswalks.

• Always look left, right, and left again before crossing a street, and keep watching as you cross. Be aware that drivers have differing levels of eyesight and skill in operating motor vehicles.

Be Predictable

Make a practice of staying on one side of the path while walking rather than weaving randomly from side to side. Watch your arm motions, or you may end up giving a black eye to a passing walker, runner, or biker.

Hang Up and Eyes Up

Distracted walking due to chatting, texting, or playing games like Pokemon

Go on a mobile device while you walk is as dangerous as doing those things while driving. You are distracted and not as aware of your environment. You are less likely to recognize traffic danger, tripping hazards, or passing joggers and bikers. Potential criminals see you as an easy target. Adopt habits that can keep your phone in your pocket, or at least make it a practice to stop in a safe place to complete your phone tasks before moving on.

Walk Dogs on Short Leashes

It is terrifying and tragic to witness dogs running out in to traffic or getting into a fatal dog fight, whether on leash or off leash. But when walking your dog on a long leash there is also a danger that you will trip other walkers or bikers. You will keep your dog safer as well as those who pass by you if you use proper leash walking etiquette.

Walk defensively and be ready for unexpected events. Know what's going on around you and don't allow your vision to be blocked by clothing, hats, or items that you are carrying.

Watch the pedestrian signals, not the traffic signal, and follow the "WALK/DON'T WALK" lights (they're set up to help you cross safely). Look for pedestrian push buttons for crossing protection at signalized intersections.

Watch out for parked vehicles. Parking lots can be as dangerous as streets.

BICYCLE RIDERS

Make yourself visible: Wear reflective materials and/or bright-colored attire (A high visibility helmet, jacket, socks/shoes, and gloves are pieces you can obtain at a local bike shop). Reflective tape on your gloves helps others see hand signaling movement. Reflective tape or stickers for your bicycle or gear are also a great investment.

Illuminate: Use a white headlight and a rear reflector (or better yet, a red tail light) when riding in the dark. Try rechargeable batteries and keep your bike lights charged. Sick of dealing with batteries? Maybe a generator hub and light set is a better option for you. It's the law in PA that the reflector and lights should be visible for 500 feet. Take a friend and check each other from a distance to see just how visible you truly are.

Assume drivers don't see you: Err on the side of caution and never assume that the driver sees you, even when you have the right of way.

Give traffic an extra look before crossing at intersections.

DRIVERS' RESPONSIBILITIES TO PEDESTRIANS

Streets are used by people driving everything from 18-wheelers to bicycles, and by pedestrians crossing streets. Children, seniors and people with disabilities are at the most risk.

RECOGNIZING AND RESPECTING PEDESTRIANS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES, SENIORS AND CHILDREN

Pedestrians who use guide dogs or white canes are either blind or seriously visually impaired; they cannot see vehicles, look a driver in the eye or notice a silent hybrid or electric car

Pedestrians who are deaf or hard of hearing may use a white cane with a second strip of red at the bottom; they cannot hear a driver's approach, horn or verbal warning

Pedestrians with mobility impairments may use walkers, canes, service dogs or just walk slowly

Pedestrians may also have hidden disabilities or medical conditions that are not obvious but can exhibit when under stress, such as crossing streets. Many more pedestrians are using service dogs. These dogs do not relieve drivers of their responsibilities. Service dogs and their handlers are considered one being, and injuring or killing a service dog carries heavy penalties under the law

Pedestrians can also be children. Young children do not understand what a car could do to them. They are also often focused on what they are doing, rather than a car

SLOW DOWN

The faster a person drives, the more likely they are to be involved in a wreck, and the more likely injuries to a pedestrian will be serious or fatal. Even going 20 mph can result in fatalities

BE FOCUSED

Talking, texting, listening to loud music or speech, putting on make-up, reading, turning around or reaching down in your seat, driving while emotional or under the influence of medications causing drowsiness, street drugs or alcohol are all serious distractions

STAY AT THE SCENE IF YOU ARE INVOLVED IN AN ACCIDENT

If the pedestrian or vehicle occupant is injured, call 911

Leaving the scene can result in death for critically injured pedestrians

Leaving the scene can also result in felony charges for hit-and-run driver

The roads are out there for all of us to use, whether by car, by feet, or other mobility options. Be mindful, be safe, and be courteous to your fellow humans!

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