

Pedestrian Safety for Your Community

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The agency is an excellent source of pedestrian safety information to the walking and motoring public.

NHTSA indicates that at some point in the day, obviously, everyone is a pedestrian. They go on to indicate that, unfortunately, pedestrian injuries and fatalities remain high. In 2019, 6,205 pedestrians were killed, and an estimated 76,000 pedestrians were injured nationwide.

A pedestrian was killed every 85 minutes in traffic related crashes in 2019. There are basic safety tips for drivers, including always looking out for pedestrians everywhere - and using extra caution when driving in hard-to-see conditions such as nighttime or bad weather. As a driver, you are being asked to slow down and be prepared to stop when turning or otherwise entering a crosswalk. Drivers need to yield to pedestrians and crosswalks and stop well in advance of a crosswalk to give other vehicles an opportunity to see the crossing pedestrians so that they can stop in time as well. As a driver, you should never pass stopped vehicles at a crosswalk because there may be pedestrian activity that you cannot see from your vantage point. Obviously, follow the speed limit, especially around people on the street, at school zones, and in neighborhoods where children are present.

As a walker, you need to be sure to follow the rules of the road and obey signs and signals. You need to walk on sidewalks whenever they are available, and if there is not a sidewalk, be sure to walk facing traffic, but as far from traffic as possible. Make sure that as a walker you cross streets at crosswalks at intersections and look for cars in all directions, including those turning left or right.

If a crosswalk or intersection is not available, locate a well-lit area where you have the best view of traffic, wait for a gap in traffic that allows enough time to cross safely and continue watching for traffic as you cross.

NHTSA provides a plethora of pamphlets and information in finding and creating walkable communities, keeping your kids safe while they walk, and walking safely and staying fit as we age.

NHTSA is dedicated to promoting safe behaviors on our nation's roads and has five main components including safe people, safe speeds, safe roads, safe vehicles, and post-crash care.

There are resources, including focusing and having an approach to pedestrian and bicycle safety, how communities can develop a pedestrian safety action plan, how communities can develop a pedestrian safety program management course, pedestrian safety program technical assessment, pedestrian safety training for law enforcement, and proven safety countermeasures.

NHTSA has developed a checklist to determine your community's walkability. There is information on taking a walk with your child and deciding for yourself how walkable your community is.

The checklist includes the following questions:

1. Do you have room to walk?
2. Was it easy to cross streets?
3. Did drivers behave well?
4. Was it easy to follow safety rules?
5. Was your walk pleasant?

Finally, the checklist determines how your neighborhood stacks up and whether you have a great neighborhood for walking. Is it pretty good? Does your community need work? Do you deserve better than what you have? Or is your community a walking disaster?

There simply is no reason with all the information available that you cannot provide a safe environment for walking.