

# FLASHING BEACONS



Flashing beacons (sometimes called flashers or flashing lights) are frequently requested in the belief that they will slow down traffic. However, the real purpose of flashers is to attract attention to unexpected hazards in the roadway.

The following discussion of flashing beacons is offered to clarify the real effects of flashers, and what must be considered before flashers are installed.

## WHAT ARE THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR FLASHING LIGHTS OR BEACONS?

A flashing beacon is most effective as a warning of unexpected or hazardous conditions not readily visible to drivers. One of the more common locations where a flashing beacon is effective is at a stop sign or traffic signal controlled intersection located just beyond a curve that is hidden from the view of approaching motorists.

## WHERE SHOULD A FLASHING BEACON NOT BE USED?

Immediately after seeing a flasher, drivers must consistently see an unusual condition, which requires special attention. The condition also must be viewed as serious enough to justify having been alerted. If such a condition does not exist, it is not appropriate to install a flashing beacon.

For any traffic control device to be effective it must command the respect of motorists. If it seems arbitrary or unnecessary, drivers tend to ignore it.

## WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF UNNECESSARY FLASHING BEACONS?

When flashing beacons are used where not warranted they soon lose much of their effectiveness. After continually being alerted to a condition, which does not appear to be truly unusual, research and experience has shown that drivers actually stop seeing a flashing light. This can result in a disregard for all beacons, even those that are truly needed.



## WHAT OTHER ALTERNATIVES ARE AVAILABLE?

There are usually several options available to improve the safety of an intersection or roadway when a problem truly exists. It helps to approach the situation with an open mind and to work together toward solutions.

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For example, a request is received for a flashing beacon above a busy, unsignalized intersection crossed by children on their way to and from school at a marked crosswalk. The traffic engineering investigation reveals that:

1. About 30 children cross the intersection during a fifteen minute period both in the morning and afternoon.
2. There is no safe route to school plan for the area. (available from your local school)
3. There is no pedestrian safety program or crossing guard program in the school.

If a flashing beacon were installed under these conditions, the following result can be anticipated:

- ✓ The flasher will become part of the normal driving environment and be ignored because children are not always present
- ✓ The flasher may make pedestrians feel safer when, in actual fact, the flasher is providing little or no safety benefits.
- ✓ Other justified flashers will also be ignored by motorists.

Other alternatives which might be considered include the following:

- Establishing a safe route to school plan to avoid pedestrians crossings at uncontrolled locations.
- The School District assigns crossing guards to provide assistance to school age pedestrians crossing the street.

If a flashing beacon is not the appropriate treatment, what is? Contact the Public Works Department and request an investigation into the situation. Ask about other forms of traffic control that might apply.

It is of the utmost importance that flashing beacons be kept to a minimum if a high degree of respect is to be maintained for flashers that are truly needed.

### REQUESTS AND INQUIRIES

If you have questions, requests or suggestions concerning flashing beacons, call the Public Works Department at