

# PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS



Fifty years ago when traffic volumes were much lower than they are today, pedestrians could take their cues from the same traffic lights as motorists. Traffic conditions are more complex today, so it shouldn't be surprising that

questions are frequently asked about pedestrian signals, which were introduced to improve pedestrian safety.

- **Why do they always change before I get across the street?**
- **Why do some intersections have them and others don't?**
- **Pedestrian signals used to say walk or don't walk. What do those new symbols mean?**

## WHY ARE PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS AVAILABLE AT SOME INTERSECTIONS AND NOT AT OTHERS?

Pedestrian signals are installed for two main reasons: a high volume of foot traffic at an intersection, or the signals directing motorists don't meet the needs of pedestrians.

For example, some intersections are laid out at odd angles, and traffic signals can't be seen by pedestrians. In other cases, turning and merging lanes make intersections so complex that special provisions must be made for pedestrians.

## SHOULDN'T PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS BE AVAILABLE AT EVERY INTERSECTION? WOULDN'T THAT MAKE THINGS SAFER?

If existing traffic signals meet the needs of people on foot - the signals are easy to see and provide plenty of time to cross safely - there is no need for pedestrian signals. Pedestrian signals won't improve safety in such cases, and are costly to purchase, install and operate.

However, it is generally the policy of the City to install pedestrian signals at all traffic signals where

pedestrians are permitted to cross the street.

## 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 can't read English.

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

**Walking** pedestrian symbol means you may begin crossing.

A flashing or steady **upraised hand** symbol means it's too late to begin crossing. Don't enter the street but finish crossing if you have already started.

## WHY DOES IT ALWAYS DISPLAY THE UPRaised HAND SYMBOL 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 intersections that it's too late to

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safely cross the street before the traffic signal changes allowing cars to proceed. Signals are timed to allow plenty of time for people who have already started walking to safely cross the street.

The City is now installing pedestrian signals incorporating a “Count Down” feature which lets pedestrians know how many seconds are left for pedestrians to complete crossing the street. These types of pedestrian signals are being installed at all new traffic signals.

They may be retrofitted at locations where there are significant numbers of pedestrians crossing the street or where area residents have requested such “Count Down” type pedestrian signal indications.

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

**CAN I COUNT ON A SAFE CROSSING IF I CAREFULLY FOLLOW THE PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS?**

The following suggestions are offered in the interest of pedestrian safety:

- Cross every intersection defensively.
- When crossing the street, regardless of the availability of signals, cross as quickly as possible.
- 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.

**REQUESTS AND INQUIRIES**

If you have questions, requests or suggestions concerning traffic, please call the Public Works Department at