

DO MARKED CROSSWALKS PROVIDE BETTER PEDESTRIAN SAFETY?

The proper placement and use of marked crosswalks is often discussed by traffic engineers and the public. This information sheet will present facts regarding the use of crosswalks as set forth in Florida Statutes Chapter 316, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices" and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) "Florida Design Standards ..." (FDS)."

What are the regulations and standards?

Florida Statutes, Chapter 316 - State Uniform Traffic Control, is the statute that applies to all jurisdictions in the state. The basic reference in the statute is the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)." The MUTCD is used as the basis for much of the case law that has been made in the United States over the past several decades. Traffic control devices include traffic signals, traffic signs, and painted roadway lines and markings. The MUTCD covers all aspects of the placement, construction and maintenance of every form of approved traffic control device. There are five basic requirements for all traffic control devices. They must: 1. Fulfill a need. 2. Command attention. 3. Convey a clear and simple meaning. 4. Command respect of road users. 5. Give adequate time for proper response. The MUTCD emphasizes "uniformity" of traffic control devices. A uniform traffic control 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. The MUTCD also requires that similar situations be treated in the same way.

What is a crosswalk?

Florida Statutes, Chapter 316.003 defines a "crosswalk" as follows:

"(a) That part of a roadway at an intersection included within connections of the lateral lines of the sidewalks on opposite sides of the highway, measured from the curbs or, in the absence of curbs, from the edges of the traversable roadway."

"(b) Any portion of a roadway at an intersection or elsewhere distinctly indicated for pedestrian crossing by lines or other markings on the surface."

Definition (b) above refers to "marked" crosswalks. All other crosswalks are, therefore, "unmarked."

Crosswalks may be either "marked" or "unmarked." Marked crosswalks must be painted white and must be installed in accordance with the MUTCD and the "Florida Design Standards."

How are crosswalks used?

Normally, pedestrians must yield the right-of way to motorists. Florida Statutes require that pedestrians not leave a curb or other safe place such that it is impossible for a motorist to yield. In addition, pedestrians are required to yield to motorists whenever crossing a roadway at any point other than a crosswalk (marked or unmarked). These requirements place the burden of crossing at the appropriate place, and crossing in concert with the traffic signals, upon the pedestrian. Crosswalks are marked mainly to encourage pedestrians to use a particular crossing. Studies conducted on the relative safety of crosswalks support minimal installation of marked crosswalks. Studies conducted in several California locations gave surprising results. Although 2½ times as many people used the marked crosswalks, 6 to 8 times as many crashes occurred in the marked crosswalks.

What causes crashes at marked crosswalks?

Research suggests that marked crosswalks give pedestrians a false sense of security. Pedestrians often step off the curb expecting drivers of vehicles approaching the crosswalk to stop. However, drivers frequently fail to stop and cause a vehicle/pedestrian crash. At all crosswalks, both marked and unmarked, *it is the pedestrian's responsibility to be cautious and alert before starting to cross the street.* At crosswalks on multi-lane roadways, another frequent factor in causing crashes involves the driver of a vehicle in the lane nearest the curb stopping for a pedestrian who is waiting to cross or who is already in the crosswalk. The driver of a second vehicle traveling in the lane next to the stopped vehicle tries to pass the stopped vehicle and hits the pedestrian, even though it is illegal for drivers to pass a stopped vehicle at a crosswalk (Chapter 316.130(9)). Pedestrians should be very cautious when walking in a crosswalk, especially when their visibility is limited by vehicles already stopped at the crosswalk.

Where are crosswalks normally marked?

Crosswalks are marked at intersections where there is substantial conflict between vehicle and pedestrian movements, where significant pedestrian concentrations occur, where pedestrians could not otherwise recognize the proper place to cross, and where traffic movements are controlled. For example: approved school crossings and signalized and stop sign controlled intersections where there is significant pedestrian traffic or where one or more crossing locations are prohibited. The foregoing examples follow the philosophy of using marked crosswalks to encourage proper pedestrian crossing behavior. In the first case, school children are encouraged to use a crossing which is normally being monitored. In the second case, pedestrians are encouraged to avoid a prohibited crossing movement. In general, it is not good policy to paint crosswalk markings at mid-block locations where traffic is not controlled by stop signs or traffic signals. Marked crosswalks should only be used where necessary to direct pedestrians along the safest route.

What are special school crosswalks?

Crosswalks should be marked at all intersections on any "suggested route to school", usually available through your local school district. They should also be marked where there is high conflict between vehicles and crossing students, where students are permitted to cross between intersections, or where students could not otherwise cross. The best safety measure for school age children is to educate them on how and where to safely cross the street.

(Adapted from Marked Crosswalks, City of Buena Vista, CA, traffic information brochure series 1994.)