



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## Resource Document Pedestrian Safety *The Driver's Responsibility*

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### Narrative:

Motorists often share portions of the roadway with pedestrians, whether at intersections or crosswalks or on resident streets or country roads. Because the pedestrian is always the loser when car bodies and human bodies collide, drivers have a special responsibility to share the roadways safely.

Most pedestrian collisions occur in urban areas where pedestrian activity is concentrated, a situation that increases the exposure to risk. However, pedestrians are at the greatest risk for death when walking on rural roads where vehicles will be traveling at higher speeds. In addition, these accidents often happen further away from trauma centers, delaying the time before treatment can be given. While most vehicle/pedestrian accidents occur during the day, the majority of pedestrian deaths occur in dark or twilight conditions at locations other than intersections, where vehicle speeds may be higher and drivers aren't anticipating the need to stop.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the Highway Loss Institute, although children are struck more often, the fatality rate is highest for pedestrians over the age of 70. Older pedestrians typically cross intersections more slowly and suffer from diminished vision, hearing and reaction times.

A 2002 study by the IIHS conducted in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., area showed pedestrians most often at fault in collisions involving vehicles (50 percent versus 39 percent for drivers). Pedestrians were normally judged at fault in midblock and intersection dash crashes when they suddenly darted out in front of a vehicle. Drivers were typically found at fault when the vehicle was turning or backing up or when they left the roadway and struck a pedestrian.

Drunk drivers have proven themselves a threat not only to other vehicles on the highway but to

pedestrians too. During 2010, 13 percent of the pedestrian deaths involved drivers with blood alcohol concentrations of 0.08 and above.

Modern technology in the form of hybrid cars also poses a threat. Because such vehicles often operate only on electric power at low speeds, they are much quieter than regular vehicles. Because they lack the audible warning of a normal engine sound and exhaust, pedestrians may not hear these vehicles. This is a special concern for pedestrians who are visually impaired. The issue is serious enough that the Department of Transportation is under a congressional mandate to develop a requirement for equipping quiet vehicles with sounds to warn pedestrians of the vehicle's approach.

### **Key Messages:**

- Most collisions between pedestrians and vehicles happen in urban areas where the exposure to the risk is greatest. These accidents typically take place during the hours of daylight at speeds less than 40 mph.
- Most fatal collisions happen on rural roads where speed limits are higher and during the hours of twilight and darkness when visibility is reduced. Many rural roads lack lighting, making it difficult to spot pedestrians alongside the road. Because of the greater impact speeds and the extra time required to get victims to a trauma center for treatment, these collisions are more often fatal than those in urban areas.
- Alcohol has been proven a contributing factor in vehicle versus pedestrian accidents.
- Modern hybrid cars pose a special threat to pedestrians who are visually impaired and rely on hearing to detect the presence or movement of vehicles.
- Distracted driving puts pedestrians at great risk.

### **Talking points:**

- Vehicle collisions with pedestrians during 2010 accounted for 13 percent of motor vehicle crashes. The human cost of these collisions was 4,280 killed and 70,000 pedestrians injured.
- Pedestrians always have the right of way within crosswalks. If you live in a state that allows you to turn right on a red light, be careful for pedestrians who may be crossing the road you're about to turn onto.
- Urban areas pose the greatest risk for these collisions because of the numbers of vehicles and pedestrians sharing the road during the hours of daylight.
- Elderly pedestrians are at greatest risk as they move more slowly and may be less aware of the vehicle traffic around them.
- Collisions are more violent and thus more likely to be deadly on rural roads where speed limits are higher and lighting may be limited or non-existent.
- Hybrid vehicles have added a new challenge to avoiding vehicle and pedestrian collisions. Due to the quiet nature of their electric motors when running at low speeds, pedestrians may not hear their approach or be aware of their presence.
- Driving distracted increases your chances of crippling or killing a pedestrian, so put aside all distractions and pay attention to the environment around you.

### **Tips:**

Walkinginf.org online recommends drivers observe the following tips to help protect pedestrians:

- Scan the road and the sides of the road ahead for potential pedestrians.
- Before making a turn look in all directions for pedestrians.
- Do not drive distracted or after consuming alcohol or other drugs.
- Do not use your cellphone while driving.
- Look carefully behind your vehicle for approaching pedestrians — especially small children — before backing up.
- For maximum visibility, keep your windshield clean and headlights on.

- Yield to pedestrians in crosswalks, whether marked or unmarked.
- Yield to pedestrians when making right or left turns at intersections.
- Do not block or park in crosswalks.
- Never pass or overtake a vehicle that is stopped for pedestrians.
- Obey speed limits and come to a complete stop at STOP signs.
- Use extra caution when driving near children playing along the street or older pedestrians who may not see or hear you.
- Always be prepared to stop for pedestrians.
- Never drive distracted.

**Historical Reference:**

<https://safety.army.mil/>

<http://www.iihs.org/>

**Statistics:**

- In 2010, 4,280 pedestrians were killed and other 70,000 injured. Pedestrians comprised about 13 percent of motor vehicle crash deaths.
- In tests conducted by the Highway Loss Data Institute, hybrid cars were 35 percent more likely to be involved in a pedestrian crash than similar nonhybrid vehicles.
- The death rate for pedestrians above the age of 70 was more than twice that of pedestrians 69 years old or younger.
- Alcohol use by drivers was a factor in 13 percent of fatal vehicle collisions with pedestrians.

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