



NEWS RELEASE

Less Daylight Can Lead to More Pedestrian Deaths

New Pedestrian Safety Month emphasizes visibility and other safety measures

Washington, DC (October 1, 2020) – Fall and winter are a high-risk time of year for people walking and biking, and local officials are reminding residents to make safety a top priority during the coming months.

For the first time, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has declared October national Pedestrian Safety Month to call attention to the growing number of pedestrian crashes and fatalities that occur when there is less daylight. NHTSA reports that 76 percent of pedestrian deaths happen after dark.

Last year, 99 people were killed while out walking and biking in metropolitan Washington. This accounts for nearly one third of all traffic fatalities across the region.

“Fall and winter months are when we usually see a spike in crashes involving pedestrians,” said Kelly Russell, National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board Chair and City of Frederick Alderman. “When there are fewer daylight hours, visibility becomes a major safety issue. It’s important to remember that each crash statistic represents a real person, and every crash can have life-changing consequences for everyone involved.”

The annual Street Smart fall safety initiative is again urging drivers and people walking and biking to obey the rules of the road and stay alert, especially as many are distracted due to the current health crisis. The cornerstone of this year’s campaign is the collection of [gripping stories](#) told by those whose lives have been shattered by a preventable mistake on area roadways.

Among the Street Smart campaign’s safety tips for drivers are reminders to obey the speed limit, be on the lookout for people walking and biking, stop for people crossing the street, and always watch for and yield to pedestrians and bicyclists when turning. People walking are urged to cross with caution, especially when it’s dark, and use crosswalks where available. People on bikes are reminded to obey all traffic laws and always use lights at night.

Area residents can expect increased enforcement of traffic safety laws that protect people walking and biking. Police departments across the region will be educating drivers who fail to obey the speed limit or don’t stop for people in crosswalks.

The Street Smart campaign complements other regional efforts to reduce injuries and fatalities on area roadways. Earlier this year, the TPB adopted a [regional roadway safety policy](#), a set of shared actions and strategies to reduce injuries and fatalities on area roadways, including making infrastructure safer, improving road user behavior, and addressing vehicle speed and distracted driving, among other actions. It also established and funded the TPB Regional Safety Program, to assist area jurisdictions and the region with studying, developing, and implementing projects, programs, or policies that improve safety outcomes for all roadway users.

MORE: Learn more about Street Smart at BeStreetSmart.net and follow the program on Twitter at twitter.com/COGStreetSmart.

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The Council of Governments is an independent, nonprofit association where area leaders address regional issues affecting the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia.

STREET SMART SAFETY TIPS

Safety advocates say it is important for everyone to be aware of their surroundings, avoid distractions, and follow the rules of the road.

If you're driving ...

- Slow down and obey the speed limit.
- Be sure to always come to a complete stop at traffic lights and stop signs.
- Watch and wait for people using crosswalks.
- When turning right or left, yield to people walking and biking.
- Watch out for people who may occasionally walk in the roadway as they attempt to maintain social distancing.
- Allow at least 3 feet when passing bikes.
- Avoid using your cell phone and never text while driving.

If you're walking ...

- Make sure you double check for traffic if you are stepping into the street to maintain social distancing.
- Always cross at the corner and use crosswalks when available, and make sure drivers see you before you start to cross the street.
- Stick to sidewalks and designated walking paths when possible.
- Watch for turning vehicles.
- Before crossing, look left, right, and left again.
- Use caution and remain alert to others around you—drivers, people on bikes, and other pedestrians.
- Make sure others can see you, especially after dark. Wear something bright or reflective.
- Avoid using your cell phone while you're crossing the street.

If you're biking ...

- Obey signs and signals.
- Never ride against traffic.
- Ride in a straight line at least 3 feet from parked cars.
- Use hand signals to tell drivers what you intend to do.
- Wear a helmet.
- Use lights at night and when visibility is poor.
- Use bike lanes when available.