

# **CROSSWALKS**

## **Are You as Safe as You Think?**

June 2, 2014

### **SUMMARY**

According to the Department of Motor Vehicles' 2013 Driver Handbook, pedestrian deaths in California account for approximately 19% of all traffic fatalities. Due to the many reports of recent crosswalk incidents, including fatalities, the 2013-2014 Grand Jury felt that issues relating to crosswalks warranted an investigation. The more that the issue was looked into, the more it was discovered that crosswalks are unsafe.

Consistently, pedestrians disregard their own safety by entering crosswalks without watching the traffic flow, failing to make eye contact with drivers, and by focusing on personal electronic devices, e.g., cell phones and audio players.

Drivers must adhere to driving laws, pay attention to traffic conditions, and never use electronic devices while operating a vehicle. Pedestrians and motorists share the responsibility for the safe usage of crosswalks.

### **GLOSSARY**

Bulb-out	Curb and sidewalk construction at intersections that extend the sidewalk to traffic lanes to make waiting pedestrians more visible to motorists when vehicles are parked in a parking lane
FHA	Federal Highway Administration
MUTCD	Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

### **BACKGROUND**

Recent incidents involving pedestrians being hit by vehicles in crosswalks raised questions and concerns about the overall crosswalk safety in cities and unincorporated areas of Mendocino County.

### **APPROACH**

This report was generated from interviews, field observations, and online research. The Grand Jury interviewed Public Works officials from the City of Ukiah, Mendocino County, and the City of Fort Bragg. Jurors inspected crosswalks in Mendocino, Fort Bragg, Willits, Ukiah, and at various locations on county roads in the unincorporated areas of Mendocino County.

### **FACTS**

A crosswalk exists at any intersection whether or not it is marked. The only way a crosswalk can exist at a mid-block location is if it is marked. Most jurisdictions have crosswalk laws that make it legal for pedestrians to cross the street at any intersection, whether marked or not, unless a sign specifically prohibits pedestrian crossing.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) has nationwide guidelines for signage marking of crosswalks.

The FHA report titled *Safety Effects of Marked Versus Unmarked Crosswalks at Uncontrolled Locations Final Report and Recommended Guidelines* states: "Pedestrians are legitimate users of the transportation system, and they should, therefore, be able to use this system safely and without unreasonable delay. Pedestrians have a right to cross roads safely, and planners and engineers have a professional responsibility to plan, design, and install safe and convenient crossing facilities. Pedestrians should be included as design users for all streets." The report also states, "... a crosswalk at an intersection is defined as the extension of the sidewalk or the shoulder across the intersection, regardless of whether it is marked or not."

Mendocino County and City Governments use guidelines for crosswalks set forth in the *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), which states, "... the MUTCD does not provide specific guidance relative to the site condition (e.g., traffic volume, pedestrian volume, number of lanes, presence or type of median) where marked crosswalks should or should not be used at uncontrolled locations. Such decisions have historically been left to the judgment of State and local traffic engineers."

Observation of crosswalks in the cities and towns of Mendocino County revealed obvious inconsistencies in the appearance, condition, and existence of crosswalks in general:

- The design of striping
- The lack of striping
- The color of the striping
- The disrepair and lack of maintenance of striping across streets or roads

The Grand Jury's investigation brought up questions about other areas in the county with regard to the condition of crosswalks, for example:

- In whose jurisdiction is the responsibility for striping
- Local vs. inter-agency rules about striping throughout the County
- Codes regarding striping
- The process for getting striping done
- Tax sharing between cities and the County for road maintenance

The conditions of crosswalks affect pedestrians as well as drivers. All roads and crosswalks are inspected and reviewed for safety over a three-year cycle.

Mendocino County maintains crosswalks on urban roads in unincorporated locations and near schools. The County has a three-year rotating traffic safety review by an engineer for signage and accident review. Judgment based on experience and common sense is used to determine changes and repairs.

The City of Ukiah last updated its standards in 1989. It is the City's practice to look at crosswalk maintenance before school starts each year and before certain events.

Crosswalks in the City of Ukiah do not have uniform design, signage, or markings. In addition, while intersections in Ukiah may have one or two painted crosswalks, there is not always a marked crosswalk to show all the possible ways to cross the intersection.

There is some signage in Ukiah called "In-Street Pedestrian Crossing Signs" bolted to the middle of center-lined streets marked by double yellow lines, which indicate the existence of a crosswalk. The cost of each of those signs is \$200.

The City of Fort Bragg has crosswalks on all roads except sometimes in the case of dead-end roads. Crosswalk striping is repainted annually. The City surveys roads every three years and bases its maintenance of roads on volume and use.

The City of Fort Bragg collects a 0.5% sales tax which generates a fund of about \$750,000 per year for street maintenance. The 10-year tax agreement will sunset in 2014, at which time voters will be asked to approve an extension of the sales tax for another 10 years. The City of Fort Bragg controls this tax fund.

All interviewees stated crosswalks are unsafe. Crosswalk markings create an assumption that a crosswalk is safe. The Grand Jury notes during this investigation a pedestrian death occurred in Ukiah. This accident occurred within a marked crosswalk at a four-way intersection with a working traffic light signal.

Crosswalk markings are painted white, except near schools where they are painted yellow. Crosswalks are not always accompanied by signage. Bulb-outs leading to crosswalks enable pedestrians and drivers to see each other.

To accommodate visually or physically impaired persons, guidelines in the Americans with Disabilities Act must be followed. Accommodations in crosswalks may include distinguishable color differences and curb ramps with a detectable surface and color differences.

The timing of traffic lights is set or changed by the manufacturer of the system, according to the requirements of the jurisdiction. The timing is checked only if an issue is brought to the attention of the local authorities by concerned citizens. Normal timing is not adequate for disabled, elderly, or very young pedestrians. When timing has been changed to accommodate all pedestrians, power outages cause the system to revert to the default timing.

## **FINDINGS**

- F1. Countywide, the markings of crosswalks are inconsistent in appearance and condition.
- F2. Crosswalk conditions affect pedestrian safety as well as driver safety.
- F3. Pedestrian assumption that a crosswalk is safe is not true.
- F4. The increased use of electronic devices by pedestrians and drivers creates an additional distraction reducing the safety of everyone.
- F5. The lack of consistent or visible signage in many locations contributes to unsafe crosswalks.
- F6. The default timing of traffic lights is insufficient for safe crossing in crosswalks especially for physically challenged, elderly, and very young pedestrians.
- F7. All possible ways to cross at intersecting roads are not always marked.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. Crosswalks within any governmental jurisdiction have the same visual look although they may be painted in different colors to designate proximity to schools. (F1, F5, F7)
- R2. If even one crosswalk at an intersection is designated by markings, then all possible ways to cross that intersection should be painted and marked. (F7)
- R3. Crosswalks be made as visible as possible to drivers and crosswalks be marked by center line signage to indicate the presence of crosswalks as resources become available. (F2, F3, F5, F7)
- R4. Center line signage installation be prioritized as follows:  
(F1, F2, F3, F5, F7)
  - School mid-street crosswalks
  - School intersection crosswalks
  - Other mid-street crosswalks
  - Intersections without stop signs
  - Intersections with stop signs
  - Light-controlled intersections
- R5. Timing of traffic lights be evaluate and adjusted regularly at intersections with high pedestrian traffic by the responsible agency. (F2, F3, F6)
- R7. Crosswalks be made more recognizable and visible to drivers by installing consistent signage with a distinguishable and noticeable color. (F1, F5, F7)

## RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §933.05, responses are required from the following individuals:

- Director, Department of Transportation, Mendocino County: (All findings and All recommendations)
- Director, Public Works/City Engineer, City of Ukiah: (All findings and All recommendations)
- Director, Public Works, City of Fort Bragg: (All findings and All recommendations)
- Director, Public Works, City of Willits: (All findings and All recommendations)

Pursuant to Penal Code §933.05, responses are required from the following governing bodies:

- Board of Supervisors, Mendocino County: (All findings and All recommendations)
- City Council, Ukiah: (All findings and All recommendations)
- City Council, Fort Bragg: (All findings and All recommendations)
- City Council, Willits: (All findings and All recommendations)

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Safety Effects of Marked Versus Unmarked Crosswalks at Uncontrolled Locations Final Report and Recommended Guidelines*, Federal Highway Administration.

*Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, Federal Highway Administration.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.