



Traffic
Information
Program
Series

CROSSWALKS

WHEN IS A CROSSWALK UNSAFE?

Apparently, whenever it is painted on the street!

A number of years back, the City of San Diego published some startling results of a very extensive study of the relative safety of marked and unmarked crosswalks. San Diego looked at 400 intersections for five years (without signals or four-way stops) that had a marked crosswalk on one side and an unmarked crosswalk on the other. About two and one half times as many pedestrians used the marked crosswalk, but about six times as many accidents were reported in the marked crosswalks! Long Beach studied pedestrian safety for three years (1972 through 1974) and found eight times as many reported pedestrian accidents at intersections with marked crosswalks than at those without. One explanation of this apparent contradiction of common sense is the false security pedestrians feel at the marked crosswalk. Two painted lines do not provide protection against an oncoming vehicle and the real burden of safety has to be on the pedestrian to be alert and cautious while crossing any street. A pedestrian can stop in less than three feet, while a vehicle traveling at 25 MPH will require 60 feet and at 35 MPH approximately 100 feet.

The California Vehicle Code says that a crosswalk exists at all intersections unless pedestrian crossing is prohibited by signs. Some of these crosswalks are marked with painted lines, but most of them are not. Pedestrian crosswalk marking is a method of encouraging pedestrians to use a particular crossing. Such marked crossings may not be as safe as an unmarked crossing at the same location. Therefore, crosswalks should be marked only where necessary for the guidance and control of pedestrians, to direct them to the safest of several potential routes.

TraInfoProgSeries-crosswalks