



Street Department

901 N. Nelson
Spokane, WA 99202

Informational Handouts

Marked Crosswalks

Why isn't there a marked crosswalk at this intersection?

One of the most frequent requests made to the City of Spokane, Traffic Operations Division, is for the installation of marked, or painted, crosswalks.

We realize that marked crosswalk requests arise from a genuine citizen concern for pedestrian safety. However there is convincing evidence showing that marked crosswalks are not the solution to the problem of protecting pedestrians. In fact, national statistics have shown that marked crosswalks at unsignalized locations are three or four times more dangerous than unmarked crossings.

There are several reasons for this surprising statistic. High among them is the fact that many pedestrians proceed into the crosswalk as though they were protected, while in reality the lines they put so much faith in may not be visible at all to an advancing motorist. Nearly 40 percent of the motorists not only fail to perceive or react to crosswalks but also fail to see pedestrians in time to avoid a collision.

The combination of these two main factors are the reasons we generally confine our crosswalk installations to school areas and signalized intersections where both motorists and pedestrians have come to expect and depend upon them.

What are the official guidelines?

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW or State Law) generally defines crosswalks (marked or unmarked) in this manner:

There is a crosswalk at every intersection, even if painted lines do not mark it, unless the area that would normally take you to a crosswalk is barricaded or signed as closed to pedestrian traffic.

The RCW's also require all governmental agencies within the state to follow the national guidelines for traffic control devices. These guidelines are contained within the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD). The MUTCD covers all aspects of the placement, construction, and maintenance of every form of approved traffic control.

Crosswalks are marked to encourage pedestrians to use a particular crossing. The MUTCD states:

Crosswalk markings should not be used indiscriminately.



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The philosophy underlying crosswalk planning emphasizes pedestrian demand. When crosswalks are confined to heavily used locations, motorists are more apt to be alert when approaching them. If we were to install crosswalks in little used locations, drivers become oblivious to them, and the effectiveness of all crosswalks would be significantly reduced.

Where would we normally mark crosswalks?

Crosswalks should normally be marked at intersections where there is a substantial conflict between vehicle and pedestrian movements, where significant pedestrian concentrations occur, or where pedestrians could not otherwise recognize the proper place to cross. Examples of such locations are:

- Approved school crossings.
- Signalized intersections where there are pedestrian signals and where one or more crossing locations have been prohibited.

These examples follow the philosophy of marking crosswalks as a form of encouragement. In the first case, we are encouraging school children to use a crossing, which is normally being monitored. In the second case, we are encouraging all pedestrians to avoid a prohibited crossing.

While the City of Spokane is dedicated to traffic safety and being sensitive to public concerns, we have had to resign ourselves to the fact that we cannot fill all needs or requests to the public's satisfaction. Upon occasion requests are denied. Our response to requests for marking crosswalks is cautious, for test after test has proven that a marked crosswalk can be three or four times as dangerous to pedestrians as a unmarked crosswalk at the same location.

If you have any questions about Crosswalks, please contact the City of Spokane, Traffic Operations Division at (509) 232-8800.