

TRAFFIC SAFETY AND INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #16

Wouldn't installing a traffic signal reduce the number of accidents at an intersection?

It may surprise you to learn that adding traffic signals would not necessarily increase safety at an intersection. In fact, in some cases, especially when the traffic signals do not seem to be needed, some drivers may begin to ignore them or run yellow lights in an attempt to avoid delays. Therefore, officials in your area make careful decisions concerning the use of traffic signals. Here are some of the factors they consider:

Too many traffic signals can negatively impact traffic flow

Installing traffic signals where they are not needed can create traffic congestion, add travel time, and frustrate drivers, who may start driving impatiently and make inappropriate decisions. To make travel efficient and safe and to help ensure the proper observance of traffic signals, they are usually installed only where they are absolutely necessary.

Where traffic signals are installed

At least one of 11 conditions must be met for a traffic signal to be installed. The conditions include high vehicle and/or pedestrian volumes, a record of severe crashes, and school crossings where there is not enough of a gap in traffic flow for children to cross safely.

Other solutions

Many crashes at intersections are not caused by a lack of a traffic signal. Inexperienced drivers, drunk drivers, and speeding are often the cause. Therefore, traffic signals do not always offer increased safety at an intersection. Other solutions that might be considered include providing turning lanes, installing warning signs, improving roadway lighting, and installing a pedestrian crosswalk.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.