

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #25

Wouldn't a flashing yellow light draw more attention to a sign?

We sometimes get requests for a flashing light to be added to a sign. It is believed that this would draw drivers' attention to a sign and encourage them to slow down. You may be surprised to learn that this is not always true. Traffic engineers study and evaluate what locations would benefit from flashing lights and at what locations flashing lights would be a detriment. Here are some of their findings:

Flashing lights are used to alert drivers to conditions that are unusual and/or unforeseeable

Flashing lights should be used to warn drivers of unusual conditions that are not readily apparent and that require more than normal care—for example, when there is an obstruction in the roadway ahead or a narrow bridge around a curve. Some flashing lights are effective in high-speed rural environments where the roadway suddenly changes, at locations where pedestrians frequently cross, and along roadways that experience a large number of drivers who are unfamiliar with the roadway. If conditions are not unusual or unforeseeable, flashing lights may not be necessary or make the roadway any safer.

When flashing lights are overused, they may become ineffective

The effectiveness of flashing lights at any given location decreases with time. Studies have shown that when flashing lights are used too often, some drivers stop paying attention to them. Drivers may even start to ignore important signs that aren't supplemented by flashing lights.

Existing signs are often adequate

Unless conditions are unusual and/or unforeseeable, existing unlighted signs are often effective in conveying their message to drivers.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.