
PEDESTRIAN INDICATORS

Pedestrian indicators are the “WALK” and “DON’T WALK” display devices incorporated into traffic signals to help provide information to pedestrians and improve the intersection safety.

The meaning of these displays are as follows:



“WALK” or walking pedestrian symbol means you may enter the roadway and proceed across the road in the direction of the display.



A flashing or steady “DON’T WALK” or an upraised hand symbol means it’s too late to begin crossing. Do not enter the roadway but complete your crossing if you have already started.

Since pedestrian indicators are intended to help safely control traffic at an intersection, it is important that their meaning and operation be understood by all users. Therefore, the following responses are provided for the most frequently asked questions regarding pedestrian indicators:

1) Why are pedestrian indicators used?

Pedestrian indicators are used when it

is necessary to control the sequence or length of a pedestrian phase at a traffic signal, independent of or associated with the vehicular phase. Examples of where pedestrian indicators are a benefit include:

- fully-actuated traffic signals (separate timing provided for pedestrian and vehicular requirements)
- traffic signals with left turn phases (controls conflicts between left turning vehicles and pedestrian movements)
- at angled signalized intersections (where traffic signal heads can’t be seen by pedestrians)

The majority of traffic signals in the City of Nanaimo have pedestrian indicators installed.

2) Is it really necessary for me to push a button to actuate the pedestrian indicators? Can’t I just wait for the light to change?

Where push-buttons are available to pedestrians, the traffic signal is timed separately for both pedestrians and vehicles. If you don’t actuate the pedestrian indicators by pushing the button, the traffic light may not give you enough time to safely cross the street. You only need to push the button once for it to be actuated. There may be some delay before you receive the “WALK” display, so please be patient.

3) Why does it always change to “don’t walk” before I’ve completed crossing the street?

The flashing “don’t walk” or upraised hand is a warning to people who have not yet entered the intersections that it’s too late to safely cross the street before the traffic signal changes allowing cars to proceed. Signals are timed to allow plenty of time for people who have already started walking to safely complete crossing the street.

4) What are the “audible tones” I hear at some of the traffic signals?

Audible pedestrian indicators have been installed at some locations, as identified in conjunction with the CNIB. The purpose of the audible pedestrian indicators is to assist visually impaired pedestrians in crossing at locations with traffic signals. The audible tones “peep-peep” and “cuckoo” supplement the visual indicators.

5) Why are the words “walk” and “don’t walk” being replaced by symbols?

Traffic/transportation engineers world-wide are moving toward the use of symbolic signs in place of word signs because they are easier for people to comprehend in a shorter amount of time. Easily recognized symbols also accommodate people who can’t read English.

The following suggestions are offered in the interest of pedestrian safety:

- Cross intersections defensively, always be sure that vehicles have come to a stop before you enter the intersection.
- When crossing the street, regardless of the availability of pedestrian indicators, cross as quickly as possible. Minimize your time on the roadway.
- Always watch for turning vehicles. You have the legal right to be there, but that doesn't protect you from careless motorists.

Other Traffic Information Brochures Available:

- School Zone Signage
- Marked Crosswalks
- Stop Signs and Traffic Signals

If you have questions, requests or suggestions concerning traffic, please call the Engineering Department at 250-755-4409.

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