



NEWS RELEASE

Shorter days with less sunlight create dangerous conditions for pedestrians

Street Smart's Pedestrian Safety Month Campaign emphasizes safety tips and increased law enforcement presence to prevent deadly crashes this fall

Washington, D.C. (October 25, 2023) – With days growing shorter and Daylight Saving Time coming to an end, the fall and winter months are a particularly dangerous time of year for people walking and biking. To enhance safety, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' (COG) Street Smart campaign is returning for National Pedestrian Safety Month to remind drivers how to safely share the roads with bicyclists and pedestrians this fall.

National studies have shown that most deadly pedestrian crashes happen after dark, which makes fall a particularly dangerous time as sunset shifts earlier and evening commutes become darker. In 2022, 139 pedestrians and bicyclists in the region were killed in traffic crashes, a staggering 35 percent increase from 2021.

“We want everyone in our community to be able to enjoy walking, running, biking, or driving this fall, but that’s only possible if we all watch out for each other on the road,” said Jeffrey C. McKay, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman and COG Board Member. “As a community, we’ve lost too many friends and family to crashes that could’ve been prevented. We can stop these crashes from shattering more lives by following traffic laws, driving the speed limit, and learning some simple Street Smart tips.”

The campaign will include educational events sharing safety tips and heartbreaking stories of area residents whose lives were devastated by a pedestrian or bicyclist crash. Likewise, local law enforcement from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia will be conducting live enforcement events to crack down on traffic violations. The goal of the campaign is to raise awareness of the dangers associated with the fall and winter months and to encourage drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists to safely share the road together.

Street Smart, a pedestrian and bicyclist safety program created by COG in 2002, works in conjunction with ongoing efforts across the region to improve infrastructure to keep everyone safe with upgraded safety features for intersections and roadways. The campaign offers safety tips to drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists through a combination of transit ads, media outreach, digital engagement, video testimonials, and on-the-ground outreach.

STREET SMART SAFETY TIPS

Safety advocates say it is important for everyone to be aware of their surroundings, avoid distractions, and follow the rules of the road.

If you're driving ...

- Slow down and obey the speed limit.
- Stop for pedestrians at crosswalks.
- Be careful when passing buses or stopped vehicles.
- When turning, yield to people walking and biking.

- Look for bicyclists before opening your car door.
- Allow at least 3 feet when passing people on bikes.
- Put away your cell phone and never text while driving.
- Be especially careful if you drive an SUV or pickup truck—crashes involving high profile vehicles are more likely to cause death or serious injury for people walking and biking.

If you're walking ...

- Always cross the street at the corner and use marked crosswalks when they're available.
- Use the pushbuttons to request a signal change.
- Wait for the walk signal to cross the street.
- Watch for turning vehicles.
- Before crossing, look left, right, and left again.
- Try to make eye contact with drivers so that you're sure they see you.
- Be visible. Wear something light or reflective after dark.
- Watch out for blind spots around trucks and buses.
- Avoid using your cell phone while you're crossing the street.

If you're biking ...

- Be predictable. Obey signs and signals.
- Never ride against traffic.
- Ride in a straight line at least 3 feet from parked cars.
- Use hand signals to tell drivers what you intend to do.
- Wear a helmet.
- Use lights at night and when visibility is poor.
- Use bike lanes when available.
- On an off-street trail, obey all posted signs and approach intersections with caution.

MORE: Learn more about Street Smart at BeStreetSmart.net and follow us on Twitter at [@COGStreetSmart](https://twitter.com/COGStreetSmart).

CONTACT:

Jeff Salzgeber: jeffs@sherrymatthews.com, (512) 743-2659

Amanda Lau: alau@mwcog.org (202) 962-3250

Laws and regulations differ between jurisdictions. Visit BeStreetSmart.net for more information.

The Council of Governments is an independent, nonprofit association where area leaders address regional issues affecting the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia.