

Watchwords
By Officer Tom Hanshaw
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Each spring, I like to dedicate a few consecutive columns of “Watchwords” to the topic of traffic. Although we often associate the word traffic with motor vehicles, the term actually applies to many types of travel. Our roadways are used by motorcycles, bicycles, buses, horses, trucks, pedestrians and others at various times. We share the road with many forms of traffic and the sharing does not always go well, hence crashes. As we emerge from the hibernation of winter, more and more traffic will be filling up our community. The bicycles and motorcycles are just starting to hit the pavement but pedestrians have been out for some time. Whether you are out for a morning run, casual stroll or evening walk around the block, pedestrians must be especially alert to the other traffic that’s out there. After all, when a pedestrian is involved in an accident, he or she does not have thousands of pounds of steel protection.

The most important rule to remember when walking, running or jogging is to be visible. Never assume the motorist approaching, backing or turning can see you. Start with bright clothes, reflective outerwear or illuminated clothing. Be aware of where you are, avoid busier streets, stay out of the roadway and use pedestrian crossing signals if available. You should run or walk facing traffic, to see what is approaching. Don’t be afraid to break stride. Many avid runners are focused on a pace and lose track of what’s going on around them. It’s enjoyable to listen to music while outside, however, don’t turn up the volume too loudly. Consider using only one headphone so you can hear what’s around. Finally, remember what you were taught as a child, “always look both ways before crossing the street.” This applies even when there’s a crosswalk, never assume a car will stop.

The effects of the long winter are still being felt, so watch for holes and debris along the way. A fall can cause an injury, which will really slow you down. You’ve likely noticed quite a bit of construction lately, due in part because of the harsh winter. Public Works crews are busy making the repairs but it does take time. Carry a cell phone, in case of an emergency or if you need assistance as well as identification. Taking your dog along also provides companionship and can even help in case of trouble. Avoid being out after dark, if possible, because it’s always more difficult to be seen.

In closing, sidewalks are meant for pedestrians, so avoid parking a motor vehicle on them. Parking on the sidewalk forces pedestrians into the roadway and causes damage to the sidewalk itself. Replacing sidewalks is costly and usually lower on the priority list. Many neighborhoods in town have newer sidewalks, so let’s keep them that way. Parking a vehicle on the sidewalk can result in a hefty fine, \$50, but more so creates a dangerous situation, especially for children.