

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw  
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One of the biggest benefits of community policing is the ability to work with a particular group to resolve a problem or address an issue. At issue may be a criminal matter, public safety problem or community concern. In fact, quite often police officers become involved with a matter that little to do with the protection of the public but everything to do with community service. The old police logo, “to protect and to serve” has never been more prevalent. Police officers are available 24/7, which means the public often turns to them for assistance first.

A couple weeks ago, while attending the monthly Coffee with the Chiefs Hour at the Senior Center, we were approached by a community group concerned about a very serious issue. Outreach Coordinator, Doreen Brothers and several members of her Low Vision Support Group attended and expressed frustration about their attempts to cross a street. The members felt most motorists were unaware of the laws pertaining to the blind or vision impaired. Many shared stories of incidents when they waited and waited as motorists passed by, paying no attention to their quest to simply cross the street.

After a lengthy discussion, which also involved Emergency Management Director Don Swenson and Fire Chief Jon Brickett, a plan to address the public safety issue was devised. The multi-platform approach combines enforcement with education to make our streets safer for all. A few of the group members actually began to question if it was safe for them to even go outside, fearing a crash could result. No one should be afraid of a crime or public safety issue to the point he or she cannot enjoy a simple walk.

The first step of this pedestrian safety effort is to educate the public about the laws and rules pertaining to the blind. Chapter 90 Section 14A of the Massachusetts Motor Vehicle Laws covers the rules for blind pedestrians who are crossing or attempting to cross a public way. The law states, “whenever a totally or partially blind pedestrian, guided by a guide dog or carrying in a raised or extended position a cane or walking stick, which is white in color or is tipped with red, crosses or attempts to cross a way, the driver of every vehicle approaching the place where such pedestrian is crossing or attempting to cross shall bring his vehicle to a full stop.” The violation of this chapter and section carries a minimum fine of \$100.

Simply put, if you notice a blind or visually impaired person trying to cross the street, whether at a crosswalk or not, you must stop and assure he or she makes it safely to the other side. Motorists should be careful to watch for anyone carrying a white cane or walking stick, possibly tipped with red and is near the edge of the street. If he or she raises or extends the cane, they intend to cross the street. Unlike a pedestrian with good vision, someone who is impaired will not be able to see an approaching vehicle. Here are a few other pedestrian safety laws also;

Ch. 89 S 11, failure to yield, slow or stop for a pedestrian in a crosswalk. A motorist must yield to a pedestrian in a crosswalk who is on the same half of the way as the vehicle or approaches from the opposite half and is within 10 feet of the vehicle’s lane.

Ch. 89 S 11 also covers any improper passing of a vehicle that was stopped for a pedestrian in a crosswalk or blocks the crosswalk to impede a pedestrian.

Chapter 90 Section 14 reads that a motorist who is approaching a pedestrian “upon the travelled part of the way and not on a sidewalk” must slow down.

There are several laws on the books, designed to protect pedestrians but motorists have the most important task. If you see a pedestrian, jogger or runner in the roadway, slow down. It seems the thought of too many motorists today is to speed up to get around anything that’s in the road; obviously a dangerous situation. Everyone needs to share the road, so take some time to assure everyone stays safe.