



Information on Flashing Beacons



What are the right conditions for flashing lights or beacons? Where should a flashing beacon not be used? What are the impacts of unnecessary flashing beacons? What other alternatives are available?

Flashing beacons (sometimes called flashers or flashing lights) are frequently requested in the belief that they will slow down traffic. However, the real purpose of flashers is to attract attention to unexpected roadway hazards. The following discussion of flashing beacons is offered to clarify the real effects of flashers, and what must be considered before flashers are installed.

What are the right conditions for flashing lights or beacons?

A flashing beacon is most effective as a warning of unexpected or hazardous conditions not readily visible to drivers. One of the more common locations where a flashing beacon is effective is at a stop sign or traffic signal controlled intersection located just beyond a curve that is hidden from the view of approaching motorists.

Where should a flashing beacon not be used?

Immediately after seeing a flasher, drivers must consistently see an unusual condition, which requires special attention. The condition also must be viewed as serious enough to justify having been alerted. If such a condition does not exist, it is not appropriate to install a flashing beacon. For any traffic control device to be effective it must command the respect of motorists. If it seems arbitrary or unnecessary, drivers tend to ignore it.

What are the impacts of unnecessary flashing beacons?

When flashing beacons are used where not warranted they soon lose much of their effectiveness. After continually being alerted to a condition, which does not appear to be truly unusual, research and experience has shown that drivers actually stop seeing a flashing light. This can result in a disregard for all beacons, even those that are truly needed.

What other alternatives are available?

There are usually several options to improve the safety of an intersection or roadway when a problem truly exists. It helps to approach the situation with an open mind. For example, a request is received for a flashing beacon at a busy, unsignalized intersection crossed by children on their way to school. The traffic investigation reveals that:

- About 30 school-aged pedestrians cross the intersection during the school crossing time periods in the morning and afternoon.
- There is not a designated school crossing at this location.

If a flashing beacon was installed under these conditions, the following can be anticipated:

- The flasher will become part of the normal driving environment and be ignored because the children are not always present.
- The flasher may make the pedestrians feel safer when in fact the flasher is providing little or no warning to the motorists.

Other alternatives, which might be considered, include the following:

- Establishing a school crossing with the proper signs, a crosswalk, and reduced speed for a safer crossing.
- Requesting the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department to assign school crossing guards at this location.

Contact the Clark County Public Works Traffic Management Division and request an investigation into the situation. Ask about other forms of traffic control that might apply. It is of the utmost importance that flashing beacons be kept to a minimum if a high degree of respect is to be maintained for flashers that are truly needed.

Want More Information?

This flyer is for general purposes only. For more information, please contact the Clark County Department of Public Works, Traffic Management Division at (702) 455-6000 or email InTheWorks@ClarkCountyNV.gov.

NOTE: The **MUTCD** is used throughout the country as the standard by which traffic control decisions are made. Nevada Revised Statute 484A.430 and County Code 14.12.070 require the County to use the **MUTCD** for placement of all traffic control devices. The complete **MUTCD** can be found at: <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009/pdf-index.htm>