



# Information on Traffic Safety Myths



## What is a Myth?

A myth is an idea that forms part of the beliefs of a group but is not founded on fact. However, through many years of gathering facts on impact to traffic control devices and law, actions based on facts rather than myths can improve traffic flow and safety. What some citizens may perceive as a difference of opinion is in reality myth vs. factual evidence.

### Myth

**Changing a speed limit sign will significantly change the speed at which people drive.**

**Crashes occur with a greater frequency as the speed limit is increased.**

**Marking crosswalks with lines and signs will improve safety.**

**Wearing white at night makes you more visible to drivers.**

**A green light means it is safe to cross the street**

**The installation of a traffic signal will always improve safety.**

### Fact

Most drivers drive at a speed they consider reasonable and comfortable regardless of the posted speed limit. "Before and after" studies have shown that there is no significant change in speeds following the posting of a revised speed limit. This is true whether the speed limit is increased or decreased. Speed limits provide notice to drivers of the maximum speed limit on a roadway and are an enforcement tool to assist law enforcement in separating violators from the reasonable majority.

Crash frequencies have little relationship to the posted speed limit. However, severity may be impacted. In essence, a person driving significantly slower or faster than the majority of the other drivers is at a greater risk of being involved in a crash regardless of the speed limit. This is why law enforcement officers are concerned about enforcement of all speed limits.

At locations away from STOP signs or traffic signals, crosswalks are typically not marked. It has been found that marking crosswalks at such locations away from STOP signs and traffic signals increases the potential for incidents. Often pedestrians will assume the crosswalk provides significant protection and they are less cautious in crossing the street.

Even if you wear white clothes, drivers will have a hard time seeing you at night. Pedestrians should wear reflective clothing, carry a flashlight, walk facing traffic, and continue to assume drivers will not see them.

Whether walking or driving, a green light does not guarantee that vehicles will see you or yield to you. A green light should be considered as "permission" to cross, but only after carefully looking for potential conflicts. Look Left-Right-Left for vehicles. When clear, cross and stay observant.

Some types of crashes (such as right angle or broadside types) may be reduced in frequency with the installation of a traffic signal. However, other types of crashes (such as rear-end types) may increase with the installation of a traffic signal. When one street serves a much greater number of vehicles than the crossing street, the potential for an increase in the frequency of traffic crashes is higher. Other potential negative impacts may result when a traffic signal is installed when not justified.

**Traffic signals are only installed when fatal or severe crashes have occurred.**

Persons may hear of one incident, especially if a fatality occurs, and conclude that a traffic signal should be installed. Traffic signals do not necessarily reduce the frequency of crashes. In any case, making significant conclusions from a single or few incidents, especially without knowledge of the actual crash causes, will result in incorrect actions. If traffic signals were only installed when a fatal or a severe crash occurred, many times they would make no sense. For example, a driver under the influence of alcohol may run into a pole in the middle of the block. A traffic signal would not be appropriate in such a situation.

The vast majority of traffic signals are installed without a fatal crash first occurring. However, actions, which result in fewer traffic crashes, are rarely recognized. There is seemingly no impact of a traffic crash not occurring. There is no evidence, claim, court case, or media attention related to a particular crash when the incident is prevented.

**If a traffic sign is posted, then almost all drivers will obey it.**

If a sign is not reasonable, a large percentage of drivers will ignore it. Therefore, signs should have a clear purpose and be installed base on engineering experience. Unreasonable signs result in disrespect for the signs and law enforcement officers that attempt to enforce them. In addition, unreasonable signs may create poor driving habits in the public. For example, if a STOP sign is placed where it is unjustified and drivers will violate it, then drivers may carry this poor practice to other locations where it is crucial to stop.

**If the pedestrian sees the driver, then the driver sees the pedestrian.**

The driver may not see you. Make certain the driver sees you and stops before crossing in front of a vehicle. Try to make eye contact with the driver and cross at intersections.

### **Want More Information?**

This flyer is for general purposes only. For more information, please contact the Beaufort County Traffic & Transportation Engineering Department at (843) 255-2940 or [click here](#)

**NOTE:** The **MUTCD** is used throughout the country as the standard by which traffic control decisions are made. The complete **MUTCD** can be found at: [http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009r1r2/pdf\\_index.htm](http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009r1r2/pdf_index.htm)

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