Safe Community Coalition
Pedestrian Flags Over Dane County

Tips for Training "Coaches" and for Setting Up Coaching Sessions at Your Flagged Crossing

By Ann Clark, Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association; Officer Stacey Vilas, Madison Police Department; and Arthur Ross, Madison Traffic Engineering

We strongly recommend that you set up "coaching sessions" at your crossing, during which time area pedestrians learn how to use the pedestrian flags safely and effectively.

What are "coaches?" Coaches are people who train pedestrians to cross the street using pedestrian flags.

How many coaches do I need at a coaching session? It really takes two, preferably three, so you can generally keep someone on each side of the intersection (that takes continual attention, by the way). The training moment often is brief, as people may not want to wait until you can make your way across to show them how.

Do coaches need to be trained? Yes. Be sure each coach has an on-street training session, even if it's 20 minutes before the scheduled public coaching period, BEFORE they help others. It's important to their confidence, and will be safer because they are not having to learn all the things they must keep in mind at the same time they are responsible for someone's safety.

What do I need to bring? Take folding chairs for the quiet times. And something to drink.

How long should coaching sessions be? Limit your coaching offer to periods of about an hour and a half (think no bathroom breaks). Weeknights we chose 5:30-7 p.m., to avoid the height of rush hour, make it easy to find volunteer coaches, and for pedestrians to come by, but still light enough to be safe. Weekends give you more alternatives. Consider picking the highest pedestrian times—brunch at the local restaurant, picnic hours at the nearby park, etc.

Why is it important to "coach" area pedestrians? Know that you are training the "early adopters" who will in turn pass the word to their friends and neighbors. You will reach more people than actually appear during these coaching periods, and you should continue to educate others with snippets in your newsletter or website over the year that follows your opening coaching.

What do coaches need to know? Remember that you are instructing, not escorting people across. The goal is for them to learn the new approach in a

situation they perceive as safe, and then be able to do it alone the next time. Many people like you to cross with them the first time, explaining each step, and then have them do it all on the way back across, with your prompts for safety and clear communication with drivers, etc. Even on the first crossing, get them to carry the flag, so they get used to that and are already in an active mode. Be extra cautious, so there's leeway for their inexperience!

How far should a car be from the crosswalk before pedestrians should step into the street? Gauging the 140 foot point from the crosswalk in both directions: It's 8-9 car lengths, but that's hard to quantify too, so take a measuring tape before the training time and walk it off. Look for a good landmark near that point and tell people to use that to figure roughly to identify the closest a car can be and still stop easily.

Be sure pedestrians understand that cars inside that landmark point are too close to stop. You must let them go by, or you may cause a rear-end crash, and certainly make an enemy for the pedestrian crossing! And let them know that they can get that distance down to something more like 75 feet for a typically active adult with cars going the speed limit and the weather cooperating, as they gain experience.

Do pedestrians need to wait for a gap in traffic to step into the crosswalk? Don't wait for a gap in traffic, create it! Use the guidelines outlined above to gauge whether the car can stop. If so, then hold your flag high and in front of you at all times so it is more easily seen by drivers and reinforces your assertive stance (I AM going to cross!). If you are *not* ready to cross, keep the flag down and close to your body—otherwise you are giving drivers mixed messages.

Hold the eye contact with the driver you want to stop and be sure your body language is that you are actively crossing. Move across the parking lane if that's safe. Standing wistfully at the side of the street leads to drivers whizzing past you!

Are there materials that coaches should pass out? "Tips for 'Flagwaving' Pedestrians" sheet, and "Tips for Flagged Down Drivers." Point out the driver part, as nearly all of these pedestrians will be driving through the intersection, too. Point out the "Tips for Flagged Down Drivers" section. Be sure they realize that a stopped car at an intersection may obscure a pedestrian crossing, so they should NOT pass such a car until they are sure it's not the case. The fine is $222.50 because it's so dangerous to pedestrians! This is the most common complaint of our pedestrians—and it really scares them!