The summer season is fast approaching and with increased tourist activity in Florence it is important to focus on everyone's safety. We would like to take this opportunity to remind our community members on how the pedestrian activated crossing signals work (also known as Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons), how long a vehicle has to stop, and what the "rules of the road" are for the motoring public.

The pedestrian activated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon, or RRFB as it is known in the traffic engineering industry, are being used throughout the State of Oregon. They are common features at key crossing locations where there is high volumes of pedestrian and bicycle crossings. The RRFBs enhance pedestrian conspicuity and increase driver awareness at non-traffic signalized intersections and marked crosswalks. RRFB's are useful at many types of pedestrian crossing locations, but are particularly effective at multilane crossings with speed limits less than 40 mph. Research has shown that RRFB's can result in motorists yielding to pedestrians as high as 98-percent at marked crosswalks. In other words, they are highly effective in getting motorists to stop and allow a pedestrian to cross the roadway.

Trivia test: Did you know that the first RRFB to be installed on a State roadway was installed at 30th and Hwy 101 in 2009? It's true! We are fortunate to have these devices in our community.

As a reminder for pedestrians and drivers the signals operate in the following manner:

When activated by the pedestrian push button, the beacon will begin flashing alternating yellow colored light similar to the pace of a strobe light. The lights and push buttons are located on both sides of the Highway behind the curb and in the center refuge island. There are signs and pavement markings directing the traveling vehicles to stop 50 feet back from the pedestrian crossing point. Even with the lights activated, the pedestrian still has a responsibility to look at the oncoming vehicles and make sure they are stopped, or are stopping, before proceeding across the roadway. Once the vehicles are stopped the pedestrian is safe to travel across the roadway. If the pedestrian is not able to completely cross the Highway within the time allowed, there is another push button in the center refuge island that will allow the pedestrian to once again activate the light system in order to cross the remaining highway lanes. Vehicles are safe to travel once the pedestrian has reached the sidewalk or crossed into the oncoming lanes on the opposite side of the center refuge island.

Successful operation of the crossing signal requires cooperation and understanding by both the pedestrian and drivers of motorized vehicles. It is very important that the pedestrian understands that

there are no laws in Oregon that require a vehicle to stop for a yellow flashing light and that just because the light is activated, it is not safe to cross the Highway until all the vehicles are stopped behind the painted stop bar. A single vehicle that stops ahead of the stop bar in the outside lane may leave the pedestrian with the impression it is safe to cross while a vehicle proceeding in the inside lane may be unaware of the pedestrian crossing the Highway. The 50 feet of clearance provides some visibility and reaction time for the vehicle and pedestrian.

One of the questions that we recently have received is why are some of the crossings placed mid-block? The mid-block locations provide the highest safety factor to the pedestrian because you eliminate turning movement conflicts to and from the roadway. Also, since Hwy 101 is a 5-section roadway (four travel lanes and a middle turn lane) a pedestrian refuge is necessary. The refuge islands are another large safety factor in providing additional safety and refuge for pedestrians or bicyclists that cannot make it across the roadway before the lights time out.

Having the RRFBs (or any modern pedestrian crossing with a refuge island) located at an intersection will eliminate a left-hand turn. This can cause issues for businesses that depend on traffic using the side street. For example, at 30th Street where a RRFB is located, you cannot legally make a left hand turn south bound onto 30th Street (yes, we have seen motorists still do it and if an officer is present, it is a ticketable offense - however most motorists do not make that turn and obey the posted 'no left turn' signage). By not allowing the left-hand movement it can be inconvenient to businesses or residents.

As with any device, over time there are improvements. The first generation of RRFBs did not have the side (pedestrian facing) flashing indicator that the lights were active. However, as in all crosswalk locations, even with an activated RRFB the pedestrian has a responsibility to look both ways and make sure that traffic has stopped before proceeding across the roadway. Likewise, the motorist has a responsibility to safely stop at the stop bar when the RRFB is activated.

The design and amber color of the rapid flash beacons is highly regulated and is a national standard which can be found in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). With the high volume of traffic, we have along the highways in town, especially during the summer months, the RRFBs have proven to be highly effective.

Citizens are encouraged to call the City of Florence Public Works office with any concerns and questions at (541) 997-4106.