

Marked Crosswalks

What are the official guidelines?

The City of Billings follows the national guidelines outlined in the *Manual On Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD). Traffic control devices include signal lights, traffic signs, and pavement markings. The MUTCD covers all aspects of the placement, construction and maintenance of every form of approved traffic control. The guidelines prescribe five basic requirements for all devices. They must:

- --- **Fulfill a need.**
- --- **Command attention.**
- --- **Convey a clear , simple meaning.**
- --- **Command respect of road users.**
- --- **Give adequate time for proper response.**



The MUTCD emphasizes "uniformity" of traffic control devices. A uniform device conforms to the regulations for dimension, color, wording and graphics. The standard device should convey the same meaning at all times. Consistent use of traffic control devices protects the clarity of their messages. As stated in the MUTCD, "uniformity" must also mean treating similar situations in the same way.

What is a crosswalk?

Crosswalks are either "marked or unmarked". The Montana Code Annotated defines a "crosswalk" as:



--- that portion of a roadway at an intersection included within the connections of the lateral lines of the sidewalks on opposite sides of the highway measured from the curbs or, in the absence of curbs, from the edges of the traversal roadway;

--- any portion of a roadway at an intersection or elsewhere distinctly indicated for pedestrians crossings by lines or other markings on the surface.

How are crosswalks used?

At any crosswalk (marked or unmarked) drivers must yield the right-of-way, slowing down or stopping if need be, to yield to pedestrians crossing the roadway within the crosswalk. It is the pedestrian's responsibility to be

cautious and alert before starting to cross the street. Crosswalks are marked mainly to encourage pedestrians to use a particular crossing.

Studies conducted on the relative safety of crosswalks support minimal installation of marked crosswalks. Research at intersections at which there were both marked and unmarked crosswalks has shown that 2 1/2 times as many people used the marked crosswalks, however, 6 times as many accidents occurred in the marked crosswalks. A pedestrian safety study in Long Beach, California, reported 8 times as many accidents in marked crosswalks compared to unmarked crosswalks. Similar studies in other cities have confirmed these results.

What causes accidents at marked crosswalks?

Research suggests that marked crosswalks give pedestrians a false sense of security. Pedestrians often step off the curb into the crosswalk expecting drivers of vehicles approaching the crosswalks to stop. However, drivers frequently fail to stop and cause an accident. At all crosswalks, both marked and unmarked, it is the pedestrian's responsibility to be cautious and alert before starting to cross the street.



At midblock crosswalks on multi-lane roadways, another frequent factor in causing accidents involves the driver in the lane nearest the curb stopping for a pedestrian that is waiting to cross or who is already in the crosswalk. The driver of a second vehicle traveling in the lane next to the stopped vehicle tries to pass the stopped vehicle and hits the pedestrian, even though it is illegal for drivers to pass a stopped vehicle at a crosswalk. Pedestrians should be very cautious when walking in a crosswalk, especially when their visibility is limited by vehicles already stopped at the crosswalk.

Where are crosswalks normally marked?

Crosswalks are marked at intersections where there is substantial conflict between vehicle and pedestrian movements, where significant pedestrian concentrations occur, and where traffic movements are controlled. The City typically places marked crosswalks at:

- --- Approved school crossings
- --- Signalized intersections

It is the City's policy to discourage marked crosswalks at midblock locations where traffic is not controlled by a stop sign or traffic signals.

Marked school crosswalks are placed at those locations along the suggested "school walking route" where there are substantial numbers of students crossing and a high potential for conflict between vehicles and students. (A map of these routes should be available from your local elementary school, if not the assistance of the traffic engineer's office is available in working with the school and the PTA/PTO to develop one). However, the best safety measure for school children is to educate them on how and where to safely cross the street. This responsibility is shared by everyone--parents, educators, police, traffic engineers, and ordinary citizens. Children must learn to safely cross streets for any number of daily activities such as going to a friends house to play or to the corner store. It is simply impractical to have marked crosswalks at every location where a child may cross the street.

