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SAN JOSE STEPS UP ENFORCEMENT TO IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Drivers and pedestrians urged to use greater caution on city streets

San José, California – In response to an increase in pedestrian-related traffic accidents, the City of San José will be stepping up enforcement and asking drivers and pedestrians to use greater caution in an effort to improve safety on San José streets.

“Safe streets for our residents is one of our highest priorities, but we also need help from the public to achieve this goal,” said Mayor Ron Gonzales. “Effective public education, aggressive traffic enforcement, and good traffic engineering are important, but ‘street smart’ drivers and pedestrians are essential for traffic safety in our neighborhoods.”

Pedestrians are encouraged to not only look both ways before entering the street, but to also maintain eye contact with drivers the entire time they are crossing the roadway.

“When entering a crosswalk, there is an expectation by pedestrians that motorists will see them and stop, once they are in the roadway,” said James Helmer, director of the City’s Transportation Department.

“Unfortunately, as recent tragic events have shown, this doesn’t always happen. Our goal is to have pedestrians be more aware of their surroundings when they step out into the street and to be actively watching for oncoming vehicles the entire time they are within the crosswalk. It is critical that we create this heightened awareness among pedestrians if we are to prevent future fatalities.”

San José Police Chief Bill Lansdowne agrees. “Obviously, drivers need to be more alert, slow down, and exercise greater caution around pedestrians, but we are also asking pedestrians to be especially careful when crossing the street.”

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Backing up the need for behavior change on the part of both drivers and pedestrians will be additional enforcement at signalized intersections, in crosswalks and at mid-block locations.

Stepped up enforcement targeted toward both drivers and pedestrians will begin immediately to reinforce laws already in place to ensure community safety. “So, if you’re thinking of jaywalking to get across the street quicker: don’t,” advises Lansdowne.

“When people make the decision to jaywalk, they don’t connect it to the fact that they could get killed doing that. We want to remind them that that is exactly what can happen. Most of all, we want to prevent that from happening.”

Drivers are also urged to pay particular attention at crosswalks, even if they have a green light. If a pedestrian incorrectly attempts to cross against the signal, it doesn’t matter at that point who has the right of way. The goal becomes very clear: avoid hitting the pedestrian.

One of the top causes of pedestrian-related accidents in San José is the right turn movement at signalized intersections. Accidents often occur when drivers look to the left for oncoming traffic, while executing a right turn movement. Drivers are cautioned to stop (it’s the law), look to the left, then to the right again, before proceeding to turn right.

Drivers are also urged to slow down in areas where they see pedestrians. Speeding contributes to a number of accidents each year. In some areas, the posted speed limit may be higher than conditions warrant if pedestrians are present. For example, although a neighborhood street might be posted at 25 MPH, it is prudent to go even slower if children are playing nearby. The same applies to school zones.

“Of added concern is the recent trend of hit and run accidents,” stated Lansdowne. “If you hit someone and stop, as required by law, it’s an accident. But, when you make the decision to run, it then becomes a crime.”

Drivers are reminded that it is the action of ***leaving the scene of the accident that can result in charges of felony hit and run***, a crime that carries significant penalties. San José had six reported hit and run pedestrian accidents over the past three months, four of which were fatalities.

While the number of reported pedestrian-related injuries has been on the decline over the last three years, from 352 in 2000, to 294 in 2002, there is still a significant need to reduce that number further, along with the number of pedestrian fatalities, which was 19 in 2000, 11 in 2001 and 19 in 2002.

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According to Helmer, “Although the City continues to take proactive steps to improve safety on San José streets, even one fatality is one too many. Therefore, we are asking the public’s cooperation to improve safety by driving smart, walking smart and bicycling smart.”

For more pedestrian safety tips, visit: www.GetStreetSmarts.org.

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