PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Developed by the Healthy Communities OCHIP group

OCHIP
Okaloosa County Health Improvement Partnership

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OVERVIEW

Pedestrian safety is a critical issue in communities across the nation, impacting children, adults, and older adults. This guide aims to provide a comprehensive overview of strategies for enhancing pedestrian safety by drawing from proven approaches and the latest research.

It is intended for use by schools, city and county governments, law enforcement agencies, and community organizations. By collaborating across these sectors, we can create safer environments for all pedestrians and reduce the number of pedestrian and cyclist-involved injuries and deaths in Okaloosa County.

ABOUT US

The Okaloosa County Health Improvement Partnership (OCHIP) is a group of agencies, organizations, businesses, and community members who want to improve the health of Okaloosa County residents. The Healthy Communities OCHIP group has a focus on injury prevention, including the reduction of emergency department visits from motor vehicle traffic related injuries involving pedestrians and cyclists.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), pedestrian fatalities accounted for 18% of all traffic fatalities in 2022, highlighting the critical need for comprehensive safety measures. Nationally, there has been an upward trend in pedestrian fatalities, with contributing factors including distracted driving, increased vehicle speeds, and inadequate pedestrian infrastructure.

Florida consistently ranks among the highest in the nation for pedestrian and bicycle fatalities. In 2023, Florida reported 779 pedestrian fatalities and 223 bicyclist fatalities, according to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FLHSMV). These alarming statistics highlight the urgency of addressing pedestrian safety.

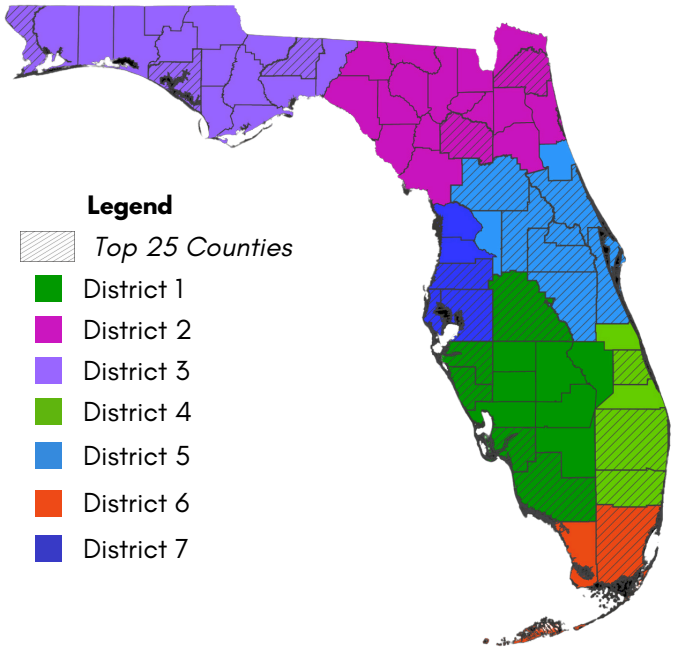
FLORIDA & LOCAL TRENDS

- From 2021 to 2023, 18 pedestrians and/or bicyclists were killed in Okaloosa County by motor vehicles. There were 493 crashes and 77 serious injuries involving pedestrians and cyclists during that time.

- The rate of emergency department visits in Okaloosa County from motor vehicle traffic-related injuries to pedestrians and cyclists decreased by nearly 50% from 2021 to 2022.

  The 2022 rate is 31.2 per 100,000.

Florida's Top 25 High Priority Counties for Fatal Pedestrian and Bicyclist Crashes



Sources: Florida Agency for Health Care Administration; Florida Department of Transportation; Florida Traffic Safety Dashboard

SCHOOL INITIATIVES

Schools play a vital role in educating youth. Safety education programs should be integrated at all grade levels. Safety programs can include lessons on topics such as the importance of using crosswalks, understanding traffic signals, and being aware of surroundings.

Interactive activities, such as role-playing and safety drills, can make these lessons more engaging and memorable for students of all ages.

Schools should also consider partnering with school resource officers, local law enforcement agencies, and traffic safety organizations to provide specialized workshops and assemblies. These events offer demonstrations and real-life scenarios to illustrate the consequences of unsafe behaviors.

Lastly, schools should involve parents and guardians in these education efforts. Sending home informational materials, hosting parent-teacher meetings focused on pedestrian safety, and encouraging parents to model safe behaviors can reinforce the lessons learned at school.

Key Recommendations:

- Incorporate safety lessons into existing curricula across all grade levels.
- Utilize interactive and engaging methods like role-playing and safety drills.
- Address the dangers of distracted walking, especially for teenagers.

Pictured: Okaloosa County students, parents, and community members participate in Walk, Bike, Roll to School events in Crestview.

Pictured: Fort Walton Beach Police Department Officer Schohn talks to Head Start youth about pedestrian safety and shares items from FODT.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

INFRASTRUCTURE

City and county governments play a pivotal role in ensuring pedestrian safety through the design and maintenance of infrastructure. One of the most effective ways to enhance pedestrian safety is by investing in infrastructure improvements. This includes the construction of sidewalks, pedestrian bridges, and underpasses that separate pedestrian traffic from vehicular traffic.

These types of engineering solutions are critical in creating a safe and welcoming environment for pedestrians. They not only enhance the physical safety of pedestrians but also promote a culture of walking by making pedestrian infrastructure more attractive and user-friendly.

Key Recommendations:

- Invest in building and maintaining sidewalks, pedestrian bridges, and underpasses.
- Conduct regular inspections and timely repairs of existing pedestrian infrastructure.
- Implement traffic calming measures in residential areas and near schools.

Pictured: Example of a high visibility crosswalk in Golden, Colorado.

High Visibility Crosswalks. High visibility crosswalks utilizing bold, reflective striping and signage are essential for ensuring pedestrians can cross roads safely. This is especially important in areas with high pedestrian traffic, such as tourist destinations and urban centers.

Key Features:

- *Reflective materials:* To improve visibility at night and during adverse weather conditions.
- *Advanced stop lines:* Positioned before crosswalks to ensure vehicles stop further back from the intersection.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

INFRASTRUCTURE

Pedestrian Signals and Countdown Timers. Pedestrian signals and countdown timers help pedestrians safely navigate intersections. These devices provide clear information on how much time remains to cross the street, reducing the likelihood of pedestrians getting caught in the middle of the road when the light changes.

Key Features:

- *Countdown timers:* Indicate the number of seconds left to cross.
- *Audible signals:* Assist visually impaired pedestrians by providing audio cues.

Pictured: Audible Pedestrian Signals provide non-visual directional information to pedestrians at intersection in Jacksonville, FL.

Pictured: Example of a pedestrian bridge in Gainesville, FL where an old train overpass was turned into a car-free bridge with LED lighting.

Pedestrian Bridges and Underpasses. In areas with heavy traffic, pedestrian bridges and underpasses provide safe crossing options that separate pedestrians from vehicles. These structures are particularly useful near schools, parks, and busy roadways, ensuring that pedestrians do not need to navigate across multiple lanes of traffic.

Key Features:

- *Elevated or underground pathways:* Allow safe passage over or under busy roads.
- *Accessibility features:* Include ramps and elevators to accommodate all users.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

INFRASTRUCTURE

Pictured: Example of crosswalk illuminators at intersection in Kalamazoo, MI.

Lighting and Visibility Enhancements. Proper lighting is crucial for pedestrian safety, especially in urban and suburban areas where night-time activity is common. Well-lit streets, intersections, and crosswalks enhance visibility for both pedestrians and drivers.

Key Features:

- *Street lighting:* Adequately illuminates sidewalks and crosswalks
- *Illuminated signage:* Ensures that pedestrian crossing signs are visible at night.

Green Infrastructure. Incorporating green infrastructure, such as trees and landscaping, can also contribute to pedestrian safety. These elements provide shade and aesthetic appeal, encourage walking, and can serve as buffers between sidewalks and roadways.

Key Features:

- *Tree-lined streets:* Provide shade and a sense of safety for pedestrians.
- *Buffer zones:* Green spaces between sidewalks and roads can protect pedestrians from traffic.

Pictured: Example of traffic-calming green infrastructure curb extensions with vegetation on both sides of a crosswalk in Somerville, MA.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

CROSSWALK AND SIGNAL ENHANCEMENTS

Enhancing crosswalks and traffic signals can significantly improve pedestrian safety. This includes installing high-visibility crosswalks, pedestrian countdown signals, and advanced stop lines for vehicles. Properly timed traffic signals can also reduce the risk of pedestrian-vehicle conflicts.

Key Recommendations:

- Install high-visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdown signals.
- Implement advanced stop lines to improve pedestrian visibility.
- Ensure traffic signal timing accommodates various pedestrian crossing needs.

Pictured: Example of a pedestrian refuge area at a pedestrian crossing in Bainbridge, WA.

Governments should also consider the use of pedestrian refuge islands and raised crosswalks in areas with high pedestrian traffic. These features can help reduce vehicle speeds and provide safe waiting areas for pedestrians.

LEARN MORE

- Safety Benefits of Raised Medians and Pedestrian Refuge Areas
- Urban Bikeway Design Guide
- Medians and Pedestrian Refuge Islands in Urban and Suburban Areas
- Pedestrian Refuge Island
- Safer Road Treatments: Pedestrian Refuge Island
- Crosswalk Visibility Enhancements
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridges and Tunnels
- Learn About Green Streets

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

City and county governments should develop and implement policies that prioritize pedestrian safety. This includes adopting Complete Streets policies, which ensure that transportation planning and design consider the needs of all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.

Key Recommendations:

- Adopt and implement Complete Streets policies.
- Prioritize pedestrian safety in transportation planning and development projects.
- Engage community stakeholders in policy development processes.

Pictured: Example of a Complete Streets project in Downtown Tampa, FL.

Additionally, governments should work to secure funding for pedestrian safety initiatives and infrastructure projects. This may involve applying for grants, allocating budget resources, and partnering with private organizations and non-profits.

LEARN MORE

- Complete Streets Handbook
- Complete Streets Policy Action Guide
- Florida Greenbook
- Florida Complete Streets Implementation Plan
- Traffic Safety Team: Complete Streets Strategies
- Longwood's Complete Streets Policy
- Tampa Bay Next: Complete Streets

ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement of Traffic Laws. The goal of traffic enforcement is to encourage voluntary compliance with traffic laws to reduce the number of traffic crashes. Law enforcement agencies should conduct targeted enforcement campaigns in high-risk areas. Consider using technology, such as school zone speed detection devices and red-light cameras, to monitor compliance, and provide regular training on pedestrian safety laws and best practices.

Key Recommendations:

- Conduct targeted enforcement campaigns in high-risk areas.
- Use technology to monitor compliance.

Pictured: In 2024, the cities of Niceville and Fort Walton Beach announced new initiatives to install speed cameras in school zones to assist with traffic enforcement and pedestrian safety.

Pictured: Members of the Okaloosa County Unified DUI Task Force remind residents and visitors of the dangers of impaired driving.

Distracted Driving Campaigns. Distracted driving is a major contributor to pedestrian crashes. Law enforcement agencies should engage in campaigns to reduce distracted driving, including the use of mobile phones while driving. They should also use social media and public service announcements to reach broader audiences with messages about the dangers of distracted driving.

Key Recommendations:

- Launch public awareness campaigns highlighting the dangers of distracted driving.
- Enforce laws prohibiting the use of mobile devices while driving.
- Partner with schools and community organizations to educate young drivers.

ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Partner with Community Organizations. Partnerships between law enforcement and community organizations can enhance pedestrian safety efforts. These collaborations can involve awareness campaigns, community policing initiatives, and school-based education. They can also provide valuable feedback and insights from the community, helping law enforcement tailor their strategies to local needs and concerns.

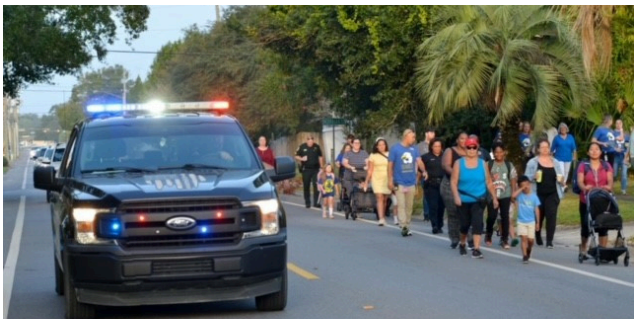
Key Recommendations:

- Establish partnerships with local community organizations and advocacy groups.
- Participate in community events to promote pedestrian safety.
- Support volunteer programs that encourage safe walking practices.

Utilize Traffic Data for Improvement Efforts. Law enforcement agencies should use traffic crash data to pinpoint locations with the highest frequency of accidents, speeding, or violations. This allows resources to be focused on areas with the greatest need.

Analyzing patterns in traffic violations, such as times of day or road conditions, to deploy officers during peak risk periods.

Share data with engineering and transportation departments to influence road design improvements like signage, lighting, or traffic calming measures, to enhance long-term road safety.



Pictured: Law enforcement assists with traffic safety during a community walk to school event in Fort Walton Beach, FL.

LEARN MORE

- High Visibility Toolkit
- Traffic Safety Resource Guide
- Using Data to Determine High Visibility Enforcement/Engagement
- Data-Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Community organizations can play a crucial role in raising awareness about pedestrian safety. By launching public awareness campaigns, these organizations can educate residents about the importance of safe walking and driving practices.

Key Recommendations:

- Use various communication channels, including social media, newsletters, and public service announcements.
- Focus messaging such as the dangers of distracted walking and driving.
- Collaborate with local media to amplify campaign reach.

The Florida Department of Transportation offers several campaigns aimed at promoting pedestrian safety. Read below to learn more about each campaign.

Put It Down: Focus on Driving. This campaign targets both pedestrians and drivers. It promotes the importance of staying alert and focused on the road environment, whether walking or driving. The campaign includes social media outreach, public service announcements, and partnerships with local organizations to spread the message. Click here for more information.

Alert Today, Alive Tomorrow. This bicycle safety campaign focuses on educating the public about the importance of pedestrian and cyclist safety and emphasizes the shared responsibility of drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists in preventing crashes. The campaign includes public service announcements, educational materials, and community outreach programs aimed at raising awareness about safe practices, such as using crosswalks, obeying traffic signals, and being vigilant while driving. Click here for more information.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Safe Routes to Schools. Florida's Safe Routes to School program can help communities address their school transportation needs and encourage more students to walk or cycle to school. It strives to enable and encourage children in Kindergarten through High School, including those with disabilities, to walk and bike to school; to make walking and biking to school safer and more appealing, and to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and improve air quality.

In addition to encouraging children to walk or cycle to school, the program also seeks to address the safety needs of children already walking or biking in less-than-ideal conditions.

A successful program integrates safety, traffic relief, health, environmental awareness, physical activity, and fitness under one program.

Pictured: Students, parents, and community members gather at a Walk, Bike, Roll to School event at Destin Elementary School.

The program encompasses routes and techniques to encourage children to walk or cycle to or from school.

We encourage schools, local transportation officials, and other qualified groups to cooperate and apply to meet some of the identified needs. At the same time, they address other identified needs locally or through other methods.

LEARN MORE

- Safe Routes to Schools
- Safe Routes to Schools Lessons and Videos
- Walk, Bike, and Roll to School
- Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Community Safety Audits. Conducting community safety audits can help identify hazardous areas and inform pedestrian safety improvements. These audits should involve local residents, traffic engineers, and law enforcement officers to provide a comprehensive assessment. The findings from these audits can guide infrastructure improvements, enforcement actions, and educational campaigns.

Pictured: Volunteers provide safe after school commutes for children and help senior pedestrians in busy intersections in San Francisco, CA.

Key Recommendations:

- Organize community safety audits to identify high-risk areas.
- Involve diverse stakeholders, including residents, engineers, and law enforcement.
- Develop action plans based on audit findings to address identified issues.

Pictured: Community members assess walkability and safety using the AARP Walk Audit Tool in Rochester, NY.

Volunteer Programs for Safe Walking. Volunteer programs can enhance pedestrian safety by providing community members with opportunities to contribute to local safety initiatives. These programs can include crossing guard programs, neighborhood watch groups, and safe walking escorts for children. These programs can also foster a sense of community and encourage residents to look out for one another.

Key Recommendations:

- Establish and promote volunteer programs focused on pedestrian safety.
- Train volunteers in traffic safety and effective communication skills.
- Recognize and reward volunteers for their contributions to community safety.

THE THREE E'S

EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental component of pedestrian safety, playing a crucial role in reducing crashes and promoting safe behaviors among all road users in Florida. Educating both pedestrians and drivers about their respective rights and responsibilities is essential in preventing crashes. In Florida, where pedestrian laws are in place to protect walkers, it's crucial that the public understands these regulations. Education campaigns help clarify laws such as the right-of-way rules, the importance of using crosswalks, and the requirement for drivers to yield to pedestrians.

Targeted Education for High Risk Groups. Florida's diverse population includes groups that may be at higher risk for pedestrian crashes, such as children, the elderly, and tourists unfamiliar with local traffic laws. Tailored education programs can address the specific needs of these groups, providing crucial information to keep them safe.

Promoting Safe Driving Behaviors. Driver education is a critical component of pedestrian safety. In Florida, educating drivers about the dangers of distracted driving, speeding, and failing to yield to pedestrians can significantly reduce the number of pedestrian crashes. Public awareness campaigns and driver education programs highlight these issues, emphasizing the importance of vigilance and courtesy on the road.

Leveraging Technology and Social Media. In the digital age, leveraging technology and social media platforms is a powerful way to reach a wide audience. State agencies and local organizations should use social media to share educational content, tips, and updates on new pedestrian safety laws or initiatives. Using platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share safety tips and campaign messages.

Through comprehensive and targeted educational efforts, pedestrian crashes and fatalities can be significantly reduced, fostering a safer environment for all road users. Whether through schools, community programs, or digital media, these initiatives play a crucial role in promoting safe walking and driving behaviors.

THE THREE E'S

ENFORCEMENT

Enforcing Speed Limits. Speed limits are fundamental to pedestrian safety, particularly in areas with high foot traffic like school zones, residential neighborhoods, and busy intersections. High vehicle speeds increase the severity of crashes and reduce the likelihood of drivers being able to stop in time. Enforcement of speed limits, therefore, plays a critical role in creating a safer environment for all road users.

Key Recommendations:

- Regular patrols and speed enforcement in high-risk areas to deter speeding.
- Visible enforcement not only catches violators, but serves as a reminder for drivers to obey traffic laws.

Crosswalk Laws. These are critical points where pedestrians and vehicles interact. Florida law requires drivers to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks, making it essential for law enforcement to ensure compliance. Proper enforcement prevents crashes and reinforces the importance of pedestrian rights.

Key Recommendations:

- Targeted campaigns to address specific issues, such as failure to yield at crosswalks.
- Ongoing enforcement of crosswalk laws and educating motorists.

Combatting Distracted Driving. The increasing use of mobile devices while driving poses significant risks to pedestrians, as distracted drivers are less likely to notice pedestrians crossing the street or walking along the roadside. Enforcing laws against distracted driving is crucial for pedestrian safety.

Key Recommendations:

- In addition to law enforcement, public awareness campaigns are essential to educate motorists.
- Law enforcement agencies should work closely with other governmental and community organizations to conduct comprehensive enforcement and public awareness campaigns.

THE THREE E'S

ENGINEERING

Engineering solutions are vital in creating safe walking environments, particularly in Florida, where the unique climate and high pedestrian traffic present specific challenges. These solutions are designed to enhance pedestrian safety through thoughtful urban design, infrastructure improvements, and the implementation of advanced technologies.

Complete Streets Design. The Florida Department of Transportation promotes the Complete Streets policy, which aims to design and operate roadways that safely accommodate all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, and transit riders. This approach ensures that streets are safe and accessible for everyone, regardless of their mode of transportation.

Key Features:

- *Wide sidewalks:* Providing ample space for pedestrians, including those with disabilities.
- *Bicycle lanes:* Designated lanes for cyclists to reduce conflicts with motor vehicles.
- *Pedestrian islands:* Safe areas for pedestrians to wait when crossing multi-lane roads.

Pictured: The Legacy Trail Extension project in the City of Sarasota, FL adds an additional 7 miles to the existing 11-mile corridor for commuters and recreational users alike.

LEARN MORE

- Traffic Engineering Manual
- Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices
- Pedestrian Safety Showcase
- Pedestrian and Bike Design

FLORIDA STATUTES

Pedestrian Rights and Duties. *Florida Statute 316.130*. Drivers must yield to pedestrians crossing the street within any marked crosswalk or at intersections without traffic signals. This rule is particularly enforced in school zones to ensure that children and other pedestrians can cross safely. Violations of pedestrian laws can result in fines and penalties, and educating the public about these laws is essential for ensuring compliance.

Key Features:

- Pedestrians must use crosswalks and obey traffic signals.
- Drivers must yield to pedestrians in crosswalks and not pass vehicles stopped for pedestrians.
- Specific protections for pedestrians with disabilities.

Pictured: Edwins Elementary School crossing guard leads students across Hollywood Boulevard in Fort Walton Beach.

School Zones. *Florida Statute 316.1905*. Mandates reduced speed limits in school zones to protect children walking to and from school. Speed limits in these zones are typically 15 to 20 miles per hour and are enforced during hours when students are likely to be present. Signs indicating the beginning and end of the school zone, as well as the specific speed limit, are prominently displayed.

Statute requires signage and roadway markings to alert drivers of school zones. This includes flashing beacons, pavement markings, and advance warning signs.

Florida Statute 316.1895 requires the deployment of trained crossing guards at certain school crossings. They play a critical role in ensuring the safe passage of children across busy streets, particularly during peak traffic times.

Key Features:

- Reduced speed limits in designated school zones during certain hours.
- Strict penalties for speeding or violating traffic laws in school zones.
- Requirements for signage and crossing guards in school areas.

FLORIDA STATUTES

Distracted Driving. *Florida Statute 316.305*. This statute prohibits drivers from using wireless communication devices to manually type or enter multiple letters, numbers, or symbols into a device while driving. This includes texting, emailing, and instant messaging.

Distracted driving is anything that takes your hands off the wheel, your eyes off the road, or your mind off driving. Texting while driving is one of the most dangerous distracted driving behaviors. Other common distractions include tending to children or passengers, eating, watching an event outside of the vehicle, and checking a GPS app.

Penalties for violating Florida's distracted driving laws vary depending on the nature of the offense and the location. First-time offenders may receive a fine, while subsequent offenses can lead to increased fines and points added to the driver's license. In school and work zones, the penalties are more severe.

Key Features:

- Prohibition of texting and use of wireless communication devices while driving.
- Increased penalties for distracted driving in school zones and construction sites.

LEARN MORE

- Florida Statutes
- Distracted Driving: Safety and Statistics
- Distracted Driving
- Pedestrian Safety

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