



Do you feel safe in PNNL crosswalks and parking lots?

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Informal responses mostly positive, but concerns surface

Summary

When the Traffic Safety Subcommittee of PNNL's Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) posted an informal survey in *Inside PNNL* to ask staff members if they feel safe in Lab parking lots and crosswalks, 95 percent said they do and 5 percent were concerned about vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian safety. VPP also asked volunteers to observe streets and parking lots around campus and report their findings. The anecdotal responses revealed concerns and prompted suggestions for making PNNL parking lots and crosswalks safer for pedestrians, cyclists--and vehicles. **Lessons Learned:** Data and personal observations show how important it is for all of us to be situationally aware in PNNL parking lots and crosswalks and to watch out for one another. We can guard against accidents by paying attention to our surroundings at all times when walking, driving or cycling.



Details

An employee-directed partnership with management, the Voluntary Protection Program is committed to enhancing PNNL's safety culture a step at a time. Concerned about safety in the Lab's parking lots and crosswalks, VPP created a subcommittee on traffic safety that began informally surveying staff members and examining vehicle incident reports. There were 692 respondents to an informal survey posted in *Inside PNNL* that asked the question: "How safe do you feel in PNNL crosswalks and parking lots?" Eighty percent, or 553, respondents affirmed that they feel safe, while 139, or 20 percent, indicated they do not feel safe due to speeding vehicles, inattentive drivers, poor crosswalk visibility, or inadequate signage/engineering controls.

The subcommittee then posted a WhiteBoard invitation for staff members to observe and report behavior in Lab parking lots and crosswalks that poses risks to staff members. Respondents identified the following kinds of behavior:

- **Being distracted.** Pedestrians were often spotted focusing on mobile devices--or simply not looking-- when stepping into crosswalks or crossing parking lots. One individual was examining a packet of information while crossing a street. Drivers were seen using cell phones and failing to yield to pedestrians on streets and in parking lots.
- **Failing to "stop, look and listen."** Drivers often fail to look when backing and many drive too fast in parking lots. One observer reported several near misses in a parking lot as inattentive drivers failed to see her. Some were driving too fast or failed to obey a stop sign. She said pedestrians should be extra cautious in parking lots. One observer noted parking lot speeds up to 35 mph. A bicyclist reported riding slowly on a marked pedestrian path when he saw a car coming that apparently was not planning to stop--or slow down--for a stop sign. When the driver finally saw the cyclist, he slammed on his brakes, missing the rider by inches.
- **Ignoring crosswalk flags.** Many individuals did not use safety flags placed at PNNL crosswalks. One observer saw seven people cross a street without flags. Another saw three pedestrians crossing without flags, but noted they were "being safe." Observers emphasized picking up a flag is not a license to cross a street without looking. One remarked, "People who pick up flags have to come out of the cell phone world into the real world."

During the five-year period from 2007 to 2012, PNNL recorded 139 vehicle incidents involving PNNL staff members who were going forward, backing up or parking at PNNL facilities and an additional 141 incidents that occurred off-site or on public roads. Those figures combine for a five-year average of slightly more than **four incidents per month**. During the first six months of 2012, the average has climbed to about six incidents per month. Only one event involved a collision that resulted in a slight injury to a non-PNNL staff member who was struck by a truck that rolled when the driver neglected to set the brake. Another injury occurred when a cyclist lost control of his bicycle and fell.

Lessons Learned

An important key to workplace safety, "situational awareness" means focusing on the real world and being mindful of risks--especially in parking lots and crosswalks where inattention can result in serious injuries. PNNL's culture includes checking badges at building entries and watching out for ourselves and our coworkers around campus. All of us can be aware of our situation and that of others, helping each other avoid potential accidents.

Crosswalk safety

- **Pedestrians**, put your phone away and look both ways before crossing. You do not have the right of way until after stepping off the curb. **Do not assume a driver sees you.** Pick up a flag if available. Suggest that others do the same. Hold the flag out before you cross and don't step off the curb until you make eye contact with approaching drivers and are certain they see you.
- **Drivers**, remember you are legally required to stop for pedestrians in a crosswalk and obey posted speed limits. **Do not assume pedestrians see you.**
- **All staff members**, avoid distractions, such as electronic devices and reading, when driving or walking. Making eye contact with others in parking lots and crosswalks is a good safety practice.

Parking lot safety

- **Pedestrians**, minimize the number of steps you take in parking lots and use walkways as much as possible. Be aware of your surroundings and watch for vehicles starting up and/or moving.
- **Drivers**, be aware of pedestrians in parking lots and especially watch crosswalks. Notice if others are entering a vehicle, intending to back or move it. Be watchful when driving, parking and backing up. Obey stop signs, posted warnings and speed limits.
- **All staff members**, slow down and be alert in high traffic areas. Learn from the examples cited above and don't assume that others see you or that drivers plan to slow down or stop at signs.

For information or to provide feedback about safety, email the [PNNL Voluntary Protection Program](#) or contact [Doug Wright](#) regarding traffic safety. For information on reporting concerns about parking lots, sidewalks and roadways at the Lab, see [Exhibit: Types of Service Requests](#) located in the first activity listed in the [Maintain Space](#) workflow in HDI.