Borough of New Providence Installs Walking Flags

New Providence has launched a program designed to improve pedestrian safety by increasing the visibility of pedestrians in crosswalks and intersections. The pedestrian crosswalk flag program provides orange flags for pedestrians to use in designated crosswalks.

"We have a significant challenge getting motorists to stop at crosswalks," Mayor Al Morgan said. "Motorists may not be paying attention to somebody waiting at the crosswalk to walk across. The problem is also compounded by the motorists' inability to see pedestrians crossing, especially in inclement weather and at certain times of the day. This is a low-tech, low-cost visibility tool meant to increase pedestrian safety. Anytime you can have some type of a system that will bring more safety to pedestrians in the crosswalk it's a good thing," Morgan said.

The idea is simple, but it could save a life. Here is how it works: Pedestrians take a flag from the bucket at their side of the crossing and wave it before crossing the street. They continue to wave the flag while crossing to be more visible while in the crosswalk. After the pedestrians have safely crossed, they place the flag in the bucket on the other side of the street. The flag is a simple, neon-colored flag mounted on a stick.

 Using the flag, however, isn't a substitute for common sense. Always make eye contact with the driver and make sure the driver sees the flag and stops before you begin crossing a street. The flag program also doesn't replace the responsibility of motorists to follow traffic rules. The law changed a couple of years ago, and no longer do drivers just have to yield for pedestrians, but now drivers are required to stop for pedestrians.

"This program requires the thought process of both the pedestrian and the driver to change," said Anthony Buccelli, Chief of Police. "The pedestrian can use this as a visibility tool, but it doesn't make them invulnerable. They still have to be cautious when crossing the street. It's not an automatic pedestrian right of way. This program is also another way to help increase driver awareness of pedestrians."

Pedestrian safety has become a top priority in communities across the state. According to the New Jersey State Police, in 2014, there were a total of 5,151 crashes statewide involving pedestrians, with 3,793 pedestrians injured and 170 killed. That includes 359 crashes involving pedestrians in Middlesex County, with 299 pedestrians injured and

seven killed; 87 in Somerset County, with 78 pedestrians injured and four killed; 282 crashes in Union County, with 237 pedestrians injured and 13 killed; and 20 crashes in Hunterdon County, with 16 injured and one killed.

For more information or if you have any questions about this program, please contact the New Providence Police department at 908-665-1111.