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Rapid Flash Beacons

The Portland Bureau of Transportation is installing pedestrian activated beacons at crosswalks on SE 82nd Avenue just south of SE Francis Street and on SE Foster Road at SE 80th Avenue. These pedestrian improvements are new to the Portland region and called Rapid Flash Beacons (RFB).

An RFB catches drivers' attention with a pair of light emitting diodes (LEDs) mounted on a pole under a pedestrian crossing sign. When the beacon is activated by a push-button system, its yellow LEDs begin flashing. Motorists are required to stop for pedestrians according to Oregon law even if the beacons are not lit. Pedestrians should make sure cars are stopped before they begin to cross the street and be aware that motorists may not obey the law or see them.

Push buttons are located on both sides of the crossing and in the median island. Brightly colored pedestrian signs and white markings on the street alert drivers and direct them to stop approximately 35 feet from the crossing.

Pedestrian improvements such as the RFBs are important because they increase motorists' awareness of pedestrians at intersections, particularly at multi-lane crossings such as those on SE 82nd and SE Foster. In Portland 37 percent of pedestrian injuries occurred in crosswalks due to driver error between 1990 and 2000. And although pedestrians accounted for only 3 percent of total traffic-related injuries during that time, they accounted for 29 percent of all traffic fatalities.

Rapid Flash Beacons combined with signage and pavement markings have been shown to increase the percentage of motorists who stop for pedestrians from approximately 18 percent before the improvement to nearly 80 percent after. Oregon crosswalk laws state that drivers must stop and stay stopped for pedestrians in a motorist's lane and the adjacent lane.

The Portland Police Bureau's Traffic division is aware of the new beacons in Southeast Portland and plans to enforce Oregon traffic laws at them. Police officers have said they will likely issue warnings to motorists that break the law during the first few months after installation and then likely issue citations thereafter.

These RFBs were paid for by the Portland Bureau of Transportation and cost approximately \$25,000 each for equipment only. The beacons are currently operating in Florence and Eugene, Ore., and St. Petersburg, Fla. More pedestrian safety information can be found at www.portlandonline.com/transportation/index.cfm?c=40554 or by calling Sharon White at 503-823-7100.

