

DID YOU KNOW???

FLASHING YELLOW ARROW – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

A flashing (blinking) yellow arrow, usually associated with a left turn, is becoming more commonplace in our cities and villages, and here is why. A blinking left arrow is used when a left turn is permitted, but oncoming traffic still has a green light and turning vehicles must yield the right of way to oncoming vehicles.

In upstate New York, the first of these signals were installed late last year. A “Did You Know” article in October, 2015, alerted readers to the forthcoming installations. Most of the information contained in this article comes from Cornell Local Roads Program and from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). Blinking yellow left turn arrows are being installed nationwide and eventually will be required at all intersections where a green left turn arrow is part of the signal phasing.

The signal phases normally associated with a blinking yellow left turn arrow are:

- Solid Red: **STOP**. You cannot turn in the direction of the red arrow.
- Green arrow: safe to turn left. [Oncoming traffic must stop.]
- Flashing yellow arrow: left turns permitted. Yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians. [Oncoming traffic has a green light.]
- Steady yellow arrow: the left-turn signal is about to change to red; prepare to stop, or prepare to complete your left turn if you are within the intersection.

Section 4D.04 of the national Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) states: “Vehicular traffic, on an approach to an intersection, facing a flashing YELLOW ARROW signal indication, displayed alone or in combination with another signal indication, is permitted to cautiously enter the intersection only to make the movement indicated by such arrow, or other such movement as is permitted by other signal indications displayed at the same time”.

Such vehicular traffic, including vehicles turning right or left or making a U-turn, shall yield the right-of-way to:

- Pedestrians lawfully within an associated crosswalk, and
- Other vehicles lawfully within the intersection.

In addition, vehicular traffic turning left or making a U-turn to the left shall yield the right-of-way to other vehicles approaching from the opposite direction so closely as to constitute an immediate hazard during the time when such turning vehicle is moving across or within the intersection.

Just recently I was approaching the traffic signal at the corner of Route 3 (Lapan Highway/River St.) and Main St. in Saranac Lake from the west (Tupper Lake). At this intersection, I wanted to make a left turn into downtown. Interestingly, I was facing a steady ball red signal, meaning I could not proceed straight or right, but I was also facing a flashing yellow left turn signal. What this meant was that I could make my left turn onto Main St. with caution, yielding to any oncoming traffic and/or pedestrians if need be, even though I was facing a red light. This was allowed because oncoming traffic from River St. had a green signal, but if there was no vehicle proceeding straight or turning right from River St. I could safely make my intended left turn.

Is this just another signal configuration to confuse drivers? No – it improves the safety of the intersection. It may be confusing at first, but it soon will become normal.

MDOT has a short video on how these signals work. I would suggest you check it out at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIkanxT72KI

For more information on traffic law and traffic safety, visit the Traffic Safety Board web site at: www.franklincony.org and go to Traffic Safety Board under “Departments”. Visit us on Facebook as well. You may also contact me by email at: dwerner151@verizon.net or call me at 483-1882.