

State Changes Rules for Drivers When Pedestrians Are at Crosswalks

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Some big changes are coming for pedestrians and motorists alike starting this week: a new set of Connecticut laws giving far more power (and, hopefully, safety) to those traveling on foot vs. vehicles.

Long before we had cars (or even horses) and trains, folks took to the roads on foot to get where they were going. But with motorized transport came the inevitable conflicts.

Why the new laws now? Because something like 1,500 pedestrians and 500-plus bike riders get hit by cars each year in this state. Many towns don't even have sidewalks and those that do still seem to favor motorists over folks on foot.

Effective Oct. 1, these are the new rules:

- 1) At crosswalks, drivers must yield to pedestrians who show intent to cross by extending an arm or moving into the crosswalk.
- 2) A driver or passenger cannot open a vehicle door in a way that hits or gets in the way of a pedestrian or bicyclist.

Violators could face a \$500 fine. They're not kidding.

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The new laws remind us that pedestrians and bicyclists matter. And while they should exercise caution, too, it's motorists who will have to start paying more attention as they careen down the roads.

Mind you, these new street crossing laws only affect designated crosswalks, not the mid-block impatience of jaywalkers. I mean, let's be reasonable, right?

Of course, it's all going to take some getting used to here in the Land of Steady Habits where motorists have always taken priority. But it will be like *deja vu* all over again for me ...

I grew up in Toronto, where pedestrians were always granted supremacy over cars. I distinctly remember as a child when the first pedestrian crosswalks opened. They were mid-block and designated by large, illuminated signs and all-too-visible paint on the roadways.

All a walker needed to do was approach the curb at a crosswalk and point in the direction they wanted to cross. For a kid, that was a lot of power: a single pointed finger would bring traffic to a halt so you could then safely cross the streets.

Pedestrians had the power, not motorists.

Of course, the drivers all obeyed. Never once do I remember a car crossing my path as I triumphantly marched to the other side. I didn't even need to make eye contact with the drivers or wave frantically "stop, you idiot." They just did. Of course, they were Canadians.

If anything, I might give them a wave or nod. Pretty cheeky for a 10-year-old kid.

Contrast that willing compliance with Connecticut, where drivers regularly cruise through stop signs and run red lights with apparent impunity. If drivers don't know and observe these new laws, someone's going to get seriously hurt, regardless of age or cheek.

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