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MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND



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Public Information Office Wins Award for Parking Lot Safety Campaign

The Montgomery County Office of Public Information (PIO) has won one of three Best of 2014 awards from the International Parking Institute for its education campaign to improve pedestrian safety in parking lots. The inaugural Parking Matters Award recognized outstanding marketing and communications programs. PIO's campaign was commended for using research and an edgy message to promote safety.

"I congratulate PIO on winning the Parking matters Award for raising awareness among drivers and pedestrians about actions they can take to avoid becoming a parking lot collision statistic," said Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett. "Pedestrian collisions in parking lots and garages were on the rise and that is why last fall I released a Parking Lot Strategic Plan that included an education campaign to reduce the number and severity of pedestrian collisions. I am committed to making Montgomery County a model of a truly walkable community, and this commitment extends to every area in the County where pedestrians and vehicles may come into conflict – including parking lots and garages."

PIO developed the parking lot safety campaign after analyzing data that showed pedestrian collisions in parking lots and garages increased over a three-year period from 2010 to 2012 – to 30 percent of all pedestrian collisions. The assumption had always been that vehicles involved in these collisions were traveling at low speeds and the resulting impacts caused little or no injury. However, in 2012 a detailed data analysis found that surprisingly, 18 percent of parking lot collisions resulted in incapacitating injuries – about the same as occurred on County roads.

"Over the last six years, County Executive Leggett's Pedestrian Safety Initiative has significantly reduced collisions in areas where we have taken a comprehensive and targeted approach, so PIO applied this same model to improving parking lot safety," said PIO Director Patrick Lacefield. "We are seeing some preliminary indications that our education campaign has changed behavior. We appreciate the recognition we received from the International Parking Institute and hope that our efforts can be a model for other communities."

Although it is too early to definitively assess the impacts of the education campaign, initial results are very encouraging. Between August and December of 2013, parking lot pedestrian collisions decreased by 30 percent compared to the same period in 2012.

To reduce the number and severity of parking lot collisions, in July 2013 staff began working with property managers and owners of private parking lots to develop a public education campaign, as 83 percent of the collisions in 2012 occurred in private, retail lots.

The campaign slogan developed reflects a simple, direct message that tells pedestrians and drivers what to do: "Heads Up in Parking Lots: Don't run over people. Don't get run over." The campaign featured photographs of people in parking lots being inattentive to what is going on around them, whether using cell phones, texting or being otherwise distracted.

The campaign emphasized no-cost and low-cost outreach techniques that focused on getting the message out to both drivers and pedestrians in parking lots. Artwork and public service announcements were developed in-house.

The campaign consisted of:

- Distribution of 20,000 reusable shopping bags and safety tip cards to shoppers at retail centers;
- Distribution of an additional 30,000 safety tip cards in parking lots, public facilities and urban centers;
- Exterior and interior bus ads;
- Bus shelter ads;
- Posters;
- Pavement decals for parking lots and store interiors;
- Two television public service announcements;
- A new website featuring downloadable education materials in English and Spanish;
- Use of social media, e-newsletters and blogs to reach about 120,000 subscribers; and

- Development of a social media toolkit for property managers and owners and their tenants.

“We have received additional funding this year from the County Council to continue this important education effort,” said Esther Bowring, PIO program manager for the parking lot education campaign.

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett has made reducing pedestrian collisions a priority of his administration. In 2007, he released the County’s first strategic plan to improve pedestrian safety through a data-driven approach. The program has successfully reduced collisions overall and particularly in targeted areas with the highest concentrations of collisions.

To try and achieve this same success in parking lots, the County Executive developed an addendum to his Pedestrian Safety Initiative in 2013 that identified strategies for reducing parking lot pedestrian collisions.

Learn more about the parking lot safety campaign on the [County’s website](#).

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