

Taking Steps to Keep Parking Lots Risk-free for Pedestrians

Here is a startling fact: 22% of the pedestrian-related collisions in Montgomery County occur in parking lots. That figure adds up to 324 parking lot collisions involving pedestrians over the past three and one-half years.

Clearly, parking lots are danger zones. Yet, we often don't consider the risks of driving and walking in a parking lot. On streets and roadways, the designated areas for cars and pedestrians are more clearly marked and help keep cars and pedestrians separated. But this is not the case in parking lots where pedestrians walk in the aisles that drivers use to enter and exit parking spaces.

Drivers often treat parking lots as speedways, and they frequently assume pedestrians see them – when they don't. For their part, pedestrians walk behind vehicles backing up, dart out between parked cars, and assume drivers see them – when they don't. The result: collisions that don't need to happen if both drivers and pedestrians would exercise caution and take more responsibility.

Nationally, little attention has been focused on the issue of pedestrian safety in parking lots, despite the magnitude of the problem. However, in response to the high number of collisions occurring in County parking lots, on October 29, 2009, Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett announced the launch of a County-wide education campaign to improve pedestrian safety in parking lots.

Advancing pedestrian safety is one County Executive Leggett's highest priorities, and over the years, he has greatly enhanced safety programs to improve engineering, enforcement and education. The County's Pedestrian Safety Initiative, which began in December 2007, targets areas of the County with the highest number of collisions and the people who are most likely to be involved in collisions. Over the past two years, education has targeted non-native English speakers, who are frequently involved in pedestrian collisions, and new drivers – both teens and adults. This year, the County Executive has allocated nearly \$5 million in additional funding from speed camera revenues to pedestrian safety efforts.

What can drivers and pedestrians do to reduce the risk of parking lot collisions? Here are a few tips:

When You are a Pedestrian

- Always stay alert for vehicles.
- Don't assume drivers see you.
- Watch for vehicles pulling out of parking spaces.

- Don't walk behind a vehicle that is backing out
- Be cautious and look around before walking out between parked vehicles.
- Treat the parking lot as you would a road – be aware and constantly look around for vehicles.

When You Are a Driver

- Parking lots are not speedways – slow down!
- Always stay alert for pedestrians.
- Don't assume pedestrians see you.
- Be especially cautious backing out of a space.
- Never cut across parking space lanes.

Remember: Safety is your responsibility!
For more information, www.montgomerycountymd.gov/walk