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**Pedestrian Safety Training Debuts at Glendale: the first of 12 locations
for a targeted, statewide program**



The City of Glendale recently received a number one ranking that no one in the community would want to boast about.

Of all California communities of its size and number of residents 65 and older, Glendale had the highest number of pedestrian fatalities for people over 65.

Further, a sixth grader was killed by a car in a crosswalk near her middle school, a crash that received wide coverage in the local press.

Together, those events highlighted Glendale's pedestrian safety problem. Glendale officials, concerned about safety and searching for help in the wake of that recent tragedy, contacted the TSC to see if it could help.

Around the same time, the TSC and its partner, California Walks (a statewide coalition of nonprofit pedestrian advocacy groups promoting walkable communities), was looking for cities that would be candidates for a series of joint trainings with the California Department of Health.

**[When Glendale contacted the TSC, the city was already on
the center's list of potential training sites.](#)**

When Glendale contacted the TSC, the city was already on the center's list of potential training sites because of its high scores on OTS pedestrian risk rankings and its commitment to safety programs using education, engineering, and enforcement (the so-called "3 E's").

On May 16, it became the first city to take part in the joint trainings, a one-day Pedestrian Safety Training Workshop conducted by the TSC with the support of the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), and a three-day workshop conducted by the department of health in which communities develop Pedestrian Safety Action Plans (PSAPs). The PSAPs workshops are facilitated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Both efforts are funded by OTS and were developed to help meet a primary objective in California's Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which is to promote development of pedestrian safety action plans in the state.

Thanks to intensive outreach efforts by local leaders, including city officials and members of the city's large Armenian-American community, nearly 50 people attended the TSC's workshop. Representatives were present from all the major city agencies, including public works, traffic and transportation, and the police department, as well as the schools, the PTA and a representative from the L.A. County Bike Coalition, which is administering a county grant to help encourage bike and pedestrian friendly planning.

**["Sweet and gentle Glendale, it used to be. Then it boomed."
—longtime resident and activist Shirley Griffin](#)**

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Shirley Griffin is a longtime resident and activist who attended the workshop. She moved to Glendale in 1973 for the quiet and the setting. "Sweet and gentle Glendale, it used to be," she said. "Then it boomed." The streets grew busier as more and more buildings were constructed to house people who commuted to the city or elsewhere. "It is very dense here, and it is hard to walk," she said.

She estimated that the area is more than half immigrants from Europe, mainly Armenia, some long-time residents, others more recent arrivals. " People in Europe, they walk, but they are not used to walking on American types of streets. They wear black or something dark."

The nearby freeway creates high-speed spillover traffic. A hospital complex of medical buildings and housing for doctors and staff is another source of traffic, along with a large community college.

Lt. Carl Povilaitis of the Glendale Police Department notes that Glendale's population of roughly 200,000 is spread over a large area, 30 square miles and 350 miles of roadways. "It's quite daunting, so we start by taking our highest risk areas first and customizing our message," he said.

Working with the planning and traffic engineering departments, the police analyzed census data and matched it up with crash data. They took the 2000 Census data of people by demographic group, people over the age of 65, and people with limited English skills and overlaid the data for pedestrian collisions and created [a temperature map showing areas of greatest concern](#).

"They tend to correlate where we have a higher percentage of people over 65 who speak little or no English and are of Armenian or Hispanic ancestry," he said.

In addition to providing a guide to increased enforcement and engineering, that information suggested a direction for their education and outreach. "It doesn't make a lot of sense to go into an area where members of our community speak little or no English with only materials written in English," he said.

"You have a lifetime's worth of habits that may not transfer here. If nobody takes the time and energy and effort to say, 'Do you understand the rules and customs?' we're wasting our time."—Lt. Carl Povilaitis

Not only are older residents more likely to be involved in a pedestrian crash, but when they are hit, they are more likely to suffer serious injury, Povilaitis noted. Additionally, for the older immigrants who arrive here as adults, "You have a lifetime's worth of habits that may not transfer here. If nobody takes the time and energy and effort to say, 'Do you understand the rules and customs?' we're wasting our time."

He was encouraged by the workshop because it showed a community commitment. "This is not a police department problem, or an engineering or planning problem, it's a community problem. It requires the involvement of the community, schools, churches."

City Councilman Ara Najarian was one of the people active in getting the workshop to Glendale. The city had been trying many different tactics to improve safety, he noted, and he commended the joint action by the police, planning, and traffic engineering departments. He praised the city's efforts but said many felt it was time for an independent look at what had been done and what could be done in the future.

Wendy Alfsen, the executive director of California Walks, who is running the trainings with the TSC, said Glendale was "fortunate because we had such a high level of commitment." She also praised the participation of so many diverse departments at high levels of the leadership. Another notable aspect of the workshop, she added, was the diversity of the group and the interest that people had in working together in complementary ways.

Colin Bogart, the L.A. County Bike Coalition representative who is the administrator of the PLACE (Policies for Livable Active Communities and Environment) grant from the Los

Angeles County Health Department, made a similar observation. Under the PLACE grant, he is being supported over the next few years to work with the city try to improve conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians.

"It seemed like a perfect fit. It's important to know what other groups are doing and how our project can complement them, and also create a way to network in the community and not duplicate efforts."

For Bogart, especially useful was the chance to interact with representatives of the Armenian community. "One of things that was very enlightening to me, a guy sitting next to me representing Armenian groups, when they were showing slides of high-visibility crosswalks, the ones with the thick white stripes, he said that those were the ones Armenians are used to seeing, and that the ones in Glendale are not what they are used to. That was a really simple solution."

Maro Yacoubian, an aide to councilman Najarian, helped make the initial contact with the TSC to inquire about a workshop. "It's been just a culmination of events, almost like a pot of water boiling."

The workshop left members of the community equipped for the next step, she said. "The participants are doing exactly what they were instructed to do, which is to go out to their stakeholders and educate people. You have to get down into the trenches."

It is crucial to establish connections between citizens and public agencies. "One thing we do is skills training on how to work with city staff"—California Walks' Wendy Alfsen

Alfsen noted that it was also crucial to establish connections between citizens and public agencies. "One thing we do is skills training on how to work with city staff," so that citizens don't simply call up and demand a specific solution, like a stop sign, but instead, they report the problem and ask staff what the possible solutions might be.

Lisa Dixon, the OTS regional coordinator who administers the training grant, noted, "the education component is key because even some traffic professionals don't know what the rules are, as to who has the right of way, what is and isn't a crosswalk. There is a learning curve." The training workshops are part of a larger effort to encourage safe walking and bicycling, especially among children, she said, "getting them out of cars, and walking again or riding their bikes. Just getting them into the habit."

Bogart recalled a longtime Glendale resident whom he talked with during the workshop saying that years ago, when he was in grade school, children had to attend bike training classes. "You weren't allowed to ride your bike to school until you passed it," he said.

Povilaitis echoed the importance of changing attitudes. By teaching and providing an example, parents "engrain these things. For example, it is worth the extra minute or two that it takes to go to the corner to cross at a crosswalk. We can do engineering, enforcement, but the things that almost sound so basic, they are what's important."

Najarian said that the challenge is to achieve the right mix of education, engineering, and enforcement. "We're telling our kids, our senior citizens to cross in crosswalks, so we need to take another look at why pedestrians are getting hit. Is it speed? Sight lines? Lack of attention by the pedestrians?"

Najarian echoed others' views that a more comprehensive approach is needed. "We're waiting to hear from our staff. We are planning on measuring our current efforts versus the state of the art. We are also hoping to develop a traffic safety plan for the community. We want to follow this through. I don't think you can ever stop working on pedestrian safety."

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