

Dutch town aims safety measures at the feet of "smartphone zombies"

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A pedestrian checks her smartphone on Broadway in New York on Saturday, August 28, 2015. Photo by: Richard Levine/Corbis via Getty Images

It's something we see all the time: A group of pedestrians stand on a street corner, waiting for the crosswalk light to turn green. At least a few are staring down at their smartphones. Maybe they all are. They may be scrolling through Instagram. They could be engrossed in a game of "Cooking Fever." Whatever they're doing with their phones, they're not fully focused on the traffic light ahead. A particularly unaware walker might even step into oncoming traffic.

They have been described as "smartphone zombies," by the Verge, an American technology, news and media network. The "zombies" have become a real concern — and one Dutch municipality wants to stem the problem before it gets worse.

Dutch Town Installs Light Lines

Now officials in Bodegraven-Reeuwijk, about 25 miles south of Amsterdam in the western Netherlands, are piloting a program that they think may help protect such distracted walkers. At a

handful of intersections around town, they have installed illuminated light emitting diode (LED) strips of light into the pavement. These are called "+Lichtlijn," or "light lines" in Dutch.

They used light emitting diode (LED) lights. An LED light contains a diode or two sided tube holding a semiconductor. That is a piece made of a metallic crystal. As electricity is passed through the diode, heat and light is released.

The "light lines" can change color and are synced with their corresponding traffic lights. As soon as the normal crossing light turns red or green, so, too, does the one in the ground.

Anticipating Problems From Trend The Government Can't Reverse

The idea, officials said, is that people on their phones are going to be staring toward their feet anyway. Why not make it more likely that they will still be able to see the traffic light in their immediate peripheral vision?

"The lure of social media, games, WhatsApp and music is great," said town alderman Kees Oskam in a statement. It comes at the expense of paying attention to traffic, though, he added. "As a government, we probably can't reverse this trend, but we can anticipate problems."

The project has attracted criticism from Veilig Verkeer Nederland (VVN). The group works to promote road safety in the Netherlands.

"What you are doing is rewarding bad behavior," a spokesperson for the group told DutchNews.nl about the light lines.

Nevertheless, schools in Bodegraven-Reeuwijk that are near the test light lines are reportedly excited about the pilot program. They are hoping it will increase safety.

HIG Traffic Systems developed the light lines. The company hopes other cities in the Netherlands will be interested in the system as well, according to Omroep West.

Distracted Walking Incidents Involving Phones In The U.S.

In the United States, "distracted walking" has become an increasingly serious problem. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 5,376 pedestrians were killed in the United States in 2015, up from 4,884 the year before. Nearly three-quarters of those deaths take place at "non-intersections." Nineteen percent occur at places where pedestrians are meant to be, including crosswalks and sidewalks.

In 2015, for the first time, the National Safety Council included facts about distracted walking incidents involving cell phones in a report. The group found that distracted walking was responsible for more than 11,100 injuries between 2000 and 2011.

The council's list of pedestrian safety tips includes such age-old advice as "Look left, right and left again before crossing the street." However, now it also warns people never to use a cellphone or other electronic device while walking.

"Walking is one of the best things we can do to stay healthy, but only if we put safety first," the group notes on its website.

Lawmakers Want To Hold Distracted Walkers Accountable

Last year, a New Jersey lawmaker introduced a bill that would have banned walking and texting at the same time. It would also ban pedestrians from using phones, iPads or other communication devices that were not hands-free, the Associated Press reported. Violators could have been fined \$50, 15 days in prison or both.

"Distracted pedestrians, like distracted drivers, present a potential danger to themselves and drivers on the road," said the bill's sponsor Pamela Lampitt at the time, according to the AP. Lampitt is a Democratic state legislator. "An individual crossing the road distracted by their smartphone presents just as much danger to motorists as someone jaywalking and should be held, at a minimum, to the same penalty."

Quiz

- 1 Which section of the article highlights the idea that some government officials would like to make it illegal to walk and use a phone?
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-2]
 - (B) "Anticipating Problems From Trend The Government Can't Reverse"
 - (C) "Distracted Walking Incidents Involving Phones In The U.S."
 - (D) "Lawmakers Want To Hold Distracted Walkers Accountable"
- 2 Which paragraph from the section "Distracted Walking Incidents Involving Phones In The U.S." BEST shows how advice given to walkers has changed?
- 3 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-2]. What purpose does the introduction serve in developing the article's main idea?
- (A) It presents a strong opinion about the problem addressed in the article.
 - (B) It outlines various perspectives on the problem addressed in the article.
 - (C) It uses a familiar situation to describe the problem addressed in the article.
 - (D) It indicates that there are different ways to solve the problem addressed in the article.
- 4 Why does the author include the section "Anticipating Problems From Trend The Government Can't Reverse"?
- (A) to explain why light lines will likely not be effective
 - (B) to highlight different opinions about using light lines
 - (C) to give information about how the light lines were designed
 - (D) to describe a solution that is more effective than light lines