



TRANSPORTATION ENGINEERING DIVISION FACT SHEETS

Traffic Signal Operations

Do emergency vehicles automatically get a green light?

What should I do when I see a dark traffic signal or signal displays that are bagged?

How do traffic signals detect traffic?



Do emergency vehicles automatically get a green light?

Traffic signals in the City of Las Vegas are equipped with Emergency Vehicle Preemption (EVP) that allows an emergency vehicle to change the traffic signal to green for the direction it is traveling. This is done by the emission of a coded strobe light from the emergency vehicle. The traffic signal detects the coded flash and interrupts normal signal operation to give the approaching emergency vehicle a green indication. Once the emergency vehicle has passed through the intersection, the traffic signal transitions back to normal operations. EVP reduces emergency vehicle delay and greatly reduces the possibility of a crash with other intersection traffic. Only official government fire and police vehicles have EVP emitting devices. Private ambulances and citizens are not allowed to have the devices.



What should I do when I see a dark traffic signal or signal displays that are bagged?

In accordance with Nevada state law (NRS 484B.250) you must treat the dark traffic signal as an all-way stop intersection. You must come to a complete stop, and can then proceed cautiously, yielding to vehicles which have previously completed a stop or are within the intersection.

When a traffic signal is not in operation, such as just before it is placed in service, the signal faces are covered (i.e., bagged) to indicate that it is not in service. In this event, you should obey other traffic control devices (e.g., stop signs) in effect at the intersection, or the directions of flaggers or traffic control officers.



How do traffic signals know when a car arrives?

Traffic signals use various methods of detection to know when vehicles are approaching or waiting at the intersection. Detection methods include in-pavement loops of wire, video, and radar. In-pavement loops are the most reliable but can require pavement cuts and lane closures for installation and maintenance. Unlike in-pavement loops, video and radar detection can be adjusted for changing conditions. Radar is generally insensitive to inclement weather and provides the most reliable direct measurement of speed. Video image detection can distinguish between different types of motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The City considers site-specific detection needs and the strengths and weaknesses of various detection technologies when selecting the appropriate technology to use and may use more than one technology at a given location.



Want More Information?

This flyer is for general purposes only. For more information, please contact the City of Las Vegas Department of Public Works, Transportation Engineering Division at (702) 229-6331 or <https://seeclixfix.com/las-vegas>

NOTE: The **Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)** is used throughout the country as the standard by which traffic control decisions are made. Nevada Revised Statute 484A.430 requires its use for placement of all traffic control devices. Find the **complete MUTCD** at <https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/> or scan the QR code.



January 2024 update