



City of Waynesboro Traffic Signal Preemption

During 2010 the City of Waynesboro began implementation of a traffic signal preemption system. Currently over half of the signals in Waynesboro are outfitted with this equipment and crews continue to work to outfit the remaining signals. The intent of this message is to provide some basic information on traffic preemption and how it works so that motorists know what to expect and how to react when they encounter it.

So what do you do when an emergency vehicle is coming and you notice the signal is being preempted by way of the flashing white light? The answer is simple, follow what the traffic light indicates for you to do. If it is red, stop. If it is yellow prepare to stop and do so. If it is green, get through the intersection and if you see emergency vehicles coming up behind you, pull to the right side of the road and stop as soon as it is safe for you to do so. Once all emergency vehicles have passed by and you have determined that it is safe for you to resume travel, do so.

Traffic preemption goes back many years and was designed to provide priority access to emergency response vehicles to signalized intersections. The primary purpose of preemption is to allow the emergency vehicle to have a green light in their direction of travel while all other directions have a red light. This greatly enhances the safety of a response not only for the responders but for all other motorists as well. Statistics clearly indicate that the most dangerous part of an emergency response is at an intersection. A secondary benefit from preemption may be the decrease in response times. This occurs because intersections can be more easily navigated when the responder has a green light versus a red one.

Preemption systems have a couple of different designs. The most popular is one that uses either a strobe or infrared emitter mounted on the emergency apparatus to activate a detector mounted on the traffic mast at the intersection. This is the type of system utilized in Waynesboro. Waynesboro currently has preemption installed on about half of our Fire apparatus and Waynesboro First Aid Crew vehicles. Other area Fire and EMS agencies use preemption as well and there are signals in Augusta County and Staunton with the technology installed.

When an emergency vehicle activates its emergency lights the preemption emitter activates as well. The first emergency vehicle whose emitter develops line of site communication with the detector on the traffic mast will activate the preemption system. This causes several things to happen. First, the traffic lights will immediately begin to cycle from green, to yellow, to red in the opposing directions. The light in the direction of travel of the emergency vehicle will cycle to green. In addition, there is a small white light mounted on the traffic signal mast. When the preemption system has been activated these lights will flash. Once the light has been fully preempted it will burn steady. If the light is out it means the signal is operating in normal mode.

Traffic signal preemption is just one tool used by emergency responders to help them safely get to an incident scene. When combined with emergency warning equipment (lights and siren) and emergency driver training programs the safety and efficiency of the response is enhanced. However, nothing takes the place of being a responsible driver and being alert at all times.

What can you do to help make our responses and your driving experience safer? First and foremost, stay alert when driving. Avoid loud music, texting and talking on the phone while driving, having lively discussions with passengers, or any other activity that would distract you from your responsibility as a driver of a motor vehicle. Second, when an emergency vehicle with warning equipment activated comes up behind you slow down, and when safe, pull to the right side of the road and stop.

Safety on the road way is everyone's responsibility. If you have questions regarding Waynesboro's preemption system or our Public Safety Services, please feel free to contact the Department of Emergency Management by calling 540-942-6698 or via email at critzergp@ci.waynesboro.va.us.



Vehicle Mounted Preemption Emitters



Traffic Signal Mast Detector and Indicator Light