



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between a Flashing Yellow Arrow and other left turn signals at intersections in Montana?

Drivers turning left typically encounter one of two signals – the protected ones, which stop oncoming traffic so you can turn safely, and the permissive ones, which tell drivers to yield and let them decide when it's safe to turn left. In the past, most permissive signals have been a circular green light.

A flashing yellow arrow is replacing the traditional “circular green” light for left turns at many intersections in Montana. It means: slow down, yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians, and turn left when it's safe.

2. Why are flashing yellow arrows replacing the circular green light?

A national studyⁱ found that the flashing yellow arrow leads to fewer crashes than the circular green light. One reason for this is that drivers are more likely to exercise caution when they see a yellow light. This means that drivers are less likely to make mistakes that lead to crashes.

3. Are flashing yellow arrows replacing the protected green arrows, too?

No.

4. How does a driver know when a Flashing Yellow Arrow will turn red?

The flashing yellow arrow is always immediately followed by either a steady yellow arrow or a green arrow; never by a red light.

5. Is it legal to pull into the intersection and wait for a gap in traffic before turning left?

Yes. Montana law permits left-turning drivers to stop in the intersection while they are waiting for traffic to clear.

6. Are drivers required to yield to pedestrians on a Flashing Yellow Arrow? What about on a green arrow?

Yes. It is possible for the pedestrian light to be on the “walk” setting while the yellow arrow is flashing. Drivers must always yield to pedestrians.

7. Why are left turns a problem?

Making a left turn is one of the most complex maneuvers for drivers. Left turns have a higher potential to result in severe injuries due to crossing oncoming traffic.

8. Are Flashing Yellow Arrows necessary at every intersection?

No. Flashing yellow arrows can only be installed at intersections with a dedicated left-turn lane.

9. Have Flashing Yellow Arrows improved safety and operations?

“A safety evaluation in Illinois in 2016 showed a 23 percent reduction in left-turn crashes after a flashing yellow arrow was installed.”ⁱⁱ

10. What does the traffic signal look like for oncoming thru traffic when I have a flashing yellow arrow?

Oncoming traffic will see green lights.

ⁱ NCHRP Report 493

ⁱⁱ Please note that other studies have shown that crashes do not decrease when a FYA is installed at an intersection that historically had a protected only left turn (a green arrow only).