

Crosswalks painted red, white in Japan pref. to encourage more drivers to stop

October 5, 2022 (Mainichi Japan)



This partially altered photo shows pedestrians on a red and white crosswalk in the city of Miyazaki on Sept. 7, 2022. (Mainichi/Yuka Shiotsuki)

MIYAZAKI -- Crosswalks painted red and white in southwest Japan's Miyazaki Prefecture are apparently making more drivers stop than before.

Miyazaki Prefectural Police began to turn ordinary crosswalks into red and white stripes this summer in a bid to make them stand out and prevent traffic deaths on crosswalks, where pedestrians are supposed to have priority over cars.

The first red and white crosswalk debuted on a street with two lanes on each side in front of the Miyazaki Prefectural Government office in the city of Miyazaki in early August. Seven major agency buildings line the street, which has heavy traffic, and government employees were seen waiting at crosswalks for cars to stop as they moved between the buildings.

Painting of crosswalks is usually handled by national, prefectural and municipal governments, among other road management bodies. However, following five fatal accidents and 129 injuries on crosswalks in the prefecture in 2020, and five deaths and 89 injuries in 2021, prefectural police decided to adopt the new crosswalk colors as an emergency measure.

Police selected dangerous spots with heavy traffic near public facilities and schools among some 8,600 crosswalks without traffic lights in the prefecture, and a total of 27 crosswalks in 14 municipalities were colored with red and white stripes. Police also painted the edges of diamond-shaped road markings that indicate there are crosswalks nearby red.

A prefectural police investigation found that before the new colors were introduced, only about 56.9% of vehicles on average had stopped when there was a pedestrian trying to cross the street. After repainting the zebra crossings, however, the figure improved to 71.7%. The project cost some 9.3 million yen (approx. \$64,000), about one-tenth of the cost to install traffic lights. Maintenance costs are also apparently reduced.

A prefectural police official commented, "They've had a certain effect, and we'd like to increase the number of (red and white) color crosswalks by urging other road management authorities to adopt them."

A 34-year-old woman who used a newly painted crosswalk on the street in front of the prefectural government office expressed expectations for its effectiveness. "It has become noticeable, so more drivers will probably stop here than before," she said.

Takushoku University associate professor Yutaka Nagami, who is knowledgeable about the painting of road signs to prevent accidents, commented, "Emphasizing the diamond marks with red is effective in raising awareness. However, there is a need to inform drivers who don't know there is an obligation to stop before crosswalks, so it would also be effective to add road markings or signs with words such as 'priority to pedestrians.'"

(Japanese original by Yuka Shiotsuki, Miyazaki Bureau)

Copyright THE MAINICHI NEWSPAPERS. All rights reserved.