

Solar-powered safety: Road signs blink their warnings

June 19 2009, By John A. Gavin

Across New Jersey, more towns are using solar-powered warning signs, capitalizing on the technology's effectiveness to inform the public, warn motorists of danger and save energy.

Lyndhurst, Wayne and Ringwood are among a growing list of towns that have gone green -- installing solar-powered signage that's environmentally friendly.

"We've already seen a reduction in [motor vehicle accidents](#) at those intersections," said Lyndhurst Police Chief James O'Connor, discussing 12 solar-powered stop signs the town erected at high-traffic residential intersections in mid-April. "If they prevent one serious injury or death, then in my opinion, it's money very well-spent."

Ringwood has a solar-powered blinking light at the intersection of Erskine Road and Skyline Drive.

And Wayne has installed five blinking lights, including four in school zones, to urge drivers to slow down. The town also has two signs -- one on Osborne Terrace and a second on Indian Road -- to reinforce its message for motorists to slow down.

The signs, which use the sun's energy to generate and store power, are low maintenance and capable of drawing motorists' attention from a distance.

In Lyndhurst, police say that blinking stop signs and yield signs have reduced incidents of driver inattention.

In Wayne, which is building an alternative-energy, natural-gas-fired cogeneration plant, the signs save money.

"There is a significant cost savings to be had over the life of the units," said Timothy Collins, Wayne's superintendent of roads. "You are not paying an electric bill to operate these lights. ... These things function 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in all [weather conditions](#) and haven't failed once in three years, and they have shown no signs of any issues."

Most of the signs in Lyndhurst are in a residential neighborhood where two cross streets, Kingsland and Page avenues, intersect with Lewandowski Street, forming a confluence that commuters use as a shortcut to the DeJessa Memorial Bridge to Nutley, the Lyndhurst Corporate Center and county roads leading to Routes 3 and 7, officials said.

But even with the rush-hour surge in traffic, the number of vehicles wasn't enough to warrant the installation of traffic signals.

"To get traffic signals (approved), you have to go through the (state) DOT (Department of Transportation)," Lyndhurst Commissioner Robert Giangeruso said. "You have to have fatalities, massive accidents and a study done by the DOT."

No statistics have been compiled yet but O'Connor said previous studies have shown that eight out of 10 accidents at the intersections were caused by driver inattention.

Lyndhurst paid \$21,750 for the signs -- appropriating funds from the \$25-an-hour fee utility companies and businesses pay the town for the

use of a police car when officers work special assignments at work sites.

"We didn't purchase a police car in three years," Giangeruso said, explaining that the signs didn't cost taxpayers extra money.

The signs, which have LED (light-emitting diode) units embedded in each corner flashing simultaneously, are capable of drawing motorists' attention three or four blocks away.

An independent study by a Texas transportation group showed that the blinking signs -- manufactured by Wisconsin-based TAPCO -- reduced incidents of vehicles running through stop signs by 52 percent.

Lyndhurst officials said the added safeguard is worth any price.

"It's a safety issue," Giangeruso said. "We don't want to wait for an accident to happen. It can be foggy at night, there can be rain. [The signs] get your attention."

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