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Green lights on plow trucks getting noticed by drivers

Safety benefits:

- A majority of county road commissions and the MDOT winter maintenance fleet is now equipped with green flashing lights, which are easier to see in low-visibility conditions.
- Making maintenance vehicles more visible during winter events helps prevent crashes between other vehicles and plows.

January 10, 2018 -- Where are the plow trucks? With more widespread use of flashing green lights on state and local winter maintenance vehicles, Michigan drivers can spot them more easily, even during whiteout conditions.

In this second winter since the Michigan Legislature passed a bill allowing public maintenance vehicles to use flashing green lights in addition to the traditional flashing yellow, city public works departments, county road commissions, and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) have been outfitting plow trucks with the more visible beacons.

A video about the changes can be found on MDOT's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUCHgrktrK8. Dr. Bernie Tekiele of the Michigan Eye Institute, who appears in the video, says of the new lights, "Our visual system would be more attracted to a bright green light versus a bright white flashing light in a heavy snowstorm."

The County Road Association of Michigan (CRA) reports that 70 percent of Michigan's 83 county road agencies used the flashing green lights on all or part of their fleets last winter, a number that has since expanded, and MDOT now has them on more than 200 of its 300 winter maintenance vehicles.

"While we heard some initial concerns that the new lights would be confused with green lights on traffic signals, in reality they would be difficult to confuse with each other," said Mark Geib, administrator for MDOT's Operations Field Services Division. "Now we hear more and more often from drivers how much more visible these lights are, particularly in blowing snow with reduced visibility."

"Driver education has been a very important piece of green light implementation, as drivers weren't expecting this light," said CRA Director Denise Donohue. "County road agencies did lots of interviews, and put green-light trucks in local Christmas parades and on their social media feeds, which has helped."

The next issue of the Michigan Secretary of State's (SOS) What Every Driver Must Know manual will also illustrate green lights, educating the next generation of drivers. CRA cautions that private plow operators are not authorized to use the green lights.

MDOT plans to have all of its winter maintenance vehicles equipped with green lights by the beginning of next winter. The cost to convert lights is less than \$100 per truck, and green lights are now specified in any new plow trucks purchased.

Studies suggest that humans can differentiate more shades of green than any other color, and is more sensitive to the green/yellow part of the light spectrum. Better visibility with green lights means safer roads for winter maintenance workers and motorists.

Additional information is also available in an infographic available online at <https://goo.gl/I95Bqo>.

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