

## Safety fears raised over mandatory daytime vehicle lights

Recent change in UK law meaning that all new cars and small commercial vehicles sold in the country must be fitted with daytime running lights has prompted safety concerns. Members of the main anti-daytime running lights (DRLs) group, Lightmare, say the high-intensity LED lights used significantly increase risk for cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists by obscuring their presence.

Their campaign against DRLs and high-intensity discharge (HID) xenon headlamps is backed by national cyclists' organisation CTC. perhaps surprisingly, the Driving Instructors Association has also thrown its weight behind it.

Lightmare says statistics from eight European countries over a 15-year period show that road fatality rates dropped faster in non-DRL countries such as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands than DRL countries such as Finland, Norway and Sweden. Campaigners say speeding and alcohol are the main underlying factors behind road deaths, not difficulty seeing cars that don't have lights on. They say training motorists to look out for vulnerable road users would be one of the most effective safety measures.

The UK's Department for Transport says DRLs could lead to a reduction in casualty rates of up to six percent, while the European Commission (where the new DRL law originates) puts the figure at three to five percent. The Commission's consultation paper emphatically states that "road users not having lighting devices – ie. pedestrians, cyclists, mopeds – do not become less conspicuous if all vehicles feature DRL".

Lightmare is headed by Roy Milnes and Ken Perham, who've been involved in a worldwide push to develop other forms of vehicle lighting for daytime use. Milnes has worked extensively with Dr Peter Heilig, professor of ophthalmology at the University of Vienna, who was instrumental in getting EU legislation on daylight running lights withdrawn in 2006. That happened after Austrian road safety statistics showed a 12 percent increase in casualties upon introduction of mandatory daytime running lights.

Perham said: "These lights are up to three times brighter than a standard halogen headlight and the high-intensity discharge xenon headlamp system causes severe distraction to a driver approaching them, to the point that the intensity of these lights hides less conspicuous objects, such as motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians, putting these vulnerable groups in danger. this situation must be considered as an urgent matter to be redressed by the government." Lightmare members are particularly concerned about DRLs contributing to the SMIDSY effect – the 'Sorry mate, I didn't see you' type collisions where motorists drive straight into cyclists who are often in their direct line of sight, which is the subject of an ongoing CTC campaign.

They quote a 2001 Danish study that found DRLs are likely to cause accidents to vulnerable road users. DRLs are allowed in the US but they aren't compulsory. The mid-1990s saw a battle between General Motors, keen to introduce DRL, and the US Department of Transport, who had safety concerns. Lightmare have asked those who think DRLs are a retrograde step for road safety to sign their petition.

What do you think? Would DRLs enhance road safety for cyclists or make you less visible to other road users? have your say in the comments box below. You can follow BikeRadar on Twitter at [twitter.com/Bikeradar](https://twitter.com/Bikeradar) and on Facebook at [facebook.com/BikeRadar](https://facebook.com/BikeRadar).

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