

# Campaigners call for ‘dazzling’ car headlights to be dimmed



The headlights of passing traffic light up the M62 at night. (Photo: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images)



[Dean Kirby](#) 4 hours Friday January 5th 2018

<https://inews.co.uk/news/campaigners-call-dazzling-car-headlights-dimmed/>

A battle is hotting up to force powerful headlights that many drivers find distracting to be dimmed.

Campaigners are writing to Government ministers calling for immediate action to tackle the xenon or high-intensity discharge (HID) lights, which they say are dazzling some motorists at night.

HID lights, which were first demonstrated in 1705, are becoming increasingly popular among some car owners and are around twice as bright as traditional soft yellow halogen lamps.

They are a type of electrical gas-discharge lamp which are also used in warehouses, cinemas and football grounds. An even brighter generation of LED lights also started to appear in 2006.

Drivers whose cars are fitted with the lights say they provide a crisp, whitish-blue beam that projects farther down the road and makes their own driving safer by increasing their reaction time.

But a growing worldwide campaign, which began in countries including the UK, the US and Australia, claims the lights are putting other road users' lives at risk.

A brighter headlight can mean that drivers are able to detect road hazards at greater distances, but having a bright light in front of you does affect your ability to adapt to seeing in the dark.

## **Farah Gatrad, Association of Optometrists**

Roy Milnes, from campaign group Lightmare, which is calling on the Government to legislate to reduce the power of the lights, said: "When a vehicle approaches from behind you with HID lights, they light up the interior of your car and make it harder for you to see the road ahead. If you're approaching one of these cars and it goes over a speed bump, you end up blinded. We don't need super-bright headlights on the road. They're just dangerous."

Researchers in Europe and the US have been investigating the effects of strong lighting on the human eye. Experts suggest the effect of the glare of modern lights is greater as people grow older.

### **Photostress**

Farah Gatrad, optometrist and regulatory officer at the Association of Optometrists, said: "Headlights, like all bright lights, can cause 'photostress', producing afterimages that may interfere with vision."

"The effect may be particularly troublesome for older patients, who may have pre-existing cataract or other eye disease that could make them more vulnerable to dazzling."

"A brighter headlight can mean that drivers are able to detect road hazards at greater distances, but having a bright light in front of you does affect your ability to adapt to seeing in the dark."

"Therefore it's important to try and strike the right balance for the driver, as well as for the other road users or pedestrians."

Organisations critical of HID headlights include the British Motorcyclists Federation, which has supported calls for a ban for several years.

Roger Geffen, policy director of Cycling UK, said: "Headlight manufacturers may claim that ever-increasing brightness is good for road safety, yet motorists are increasingly concerned about it, while cyclists probably fare even worse. It is surely time to end this dangerous arms race."

### **Sunshine responsible for 3,000 dazzle incidents**

But the AA says that the number of collisions where dazzling headlights is a contributing factor has remained constant despite an increase in vehicles with brighter headlamps.

According to the motoring organisation, dazzling headlights are a factor in around 300 injury accidents each year, compared with 3,000 dazzle incidents by the sun.

"That said, it's important that future standards of vehicle lighting develop to take account of drivers' concerns to ensure that there are no unintended consequences from regulations intended to improve road safety," a spokesman said.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said earlier this year there is no evidence that factory fitted high-power lights distract drivers and that lamp-levelling technology ensures they are safe.

Kevin Clinton, head of road safety at RoSPA, said: "Many people are concerned about levels of dazzle and glare from vehicle headlights, which they find distracting and which can cause blinking, squinting and fatigue."

He added: "Vehicle lighting technology is advancing rapidly, for example adaptive front lighting systems, which automatically adapt the headlamp beam to varying conditions including oncoming traffic and often provides better illumination for drivers. However, we are not aware of any proven links to the advances in vehicle lighting technology."

"Problems are often caused by headlights being incorrectly adjusted, or set at full beam."