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## RPI expert helps illuminate issue of Jeep headlight safety

First published: Monday, January 21, 2008

Q: Are there any regulations about how far apart automobile headlights should be? Several times during heavy fog or snow, a vehicle with its headlights on has appeared to me to be much farther away than it actually was because the headlights were mounted so close together.

I have noticed this problem specifically with Jeeps. This seems dangerous.



-- Paul Huey, Cohoes

A: We are fortunate to have experts on such matters locally at RPI's Lighting Research Center in Troy, where adjunct Assistant Professor John D. Bullough confirms your impressions about Jeeps.

"The part of the federal code that contains headlight regulations states only that headlights should be 'as far apart as practicable,' " Bullough told us. "Because some Jeeps have external front-wheel fenders, there is less distance on the front of the vehicle to separate the headlights."

It also makes sense that you have difficulty gauging the distance of those vehicles with

close-set headlights, no matter what the weather is like.

"Research from the University of Granada in Spain showed that people do tend to misestimate the vehicle distances for vehicles with closely or distantly spaced headlights in clear weather at night," Bullough said. "Fog or snow will certainly complicate things further."

Bullough said center researchers are not aware of any relationship between closely-spaced headlights and crashes, "but that does not mean there couldn't be."

He suggested that you might want to submit a complaint to the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which might investigate further. He cautioned that it will likely be necessary to submit a lot of specific information about make, model and year, but if you are willing, this is the Web address: <http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivoq/>.

If you are into learning more about federal transportation safety programs in general, you also can access that complaint form through a simpler Web address operated by NHTSA: <http://www.safercar.gov/>

That site also has information about crash test and rollover ratings, safe driving advice and a database of recalls.

Q: I work on Tech Valley Drive in East Greenbush, and traffic usually is backed up when I leave the office. The worst back-ups occur on Fridays, slightly after 5 p.m. The delay begins where Mannix Road meets Route 4, and cars line up on both Mannix Road and Tech Valley Drive.

About a year ago, there was talk of putting a traffic circle where Mannix Road and Route 4 intersect. Another solution may be installing an I-90 on-ramp directly from Tech Valley Drive, since part of it is only a few yards from the highway.

Please let us know if any plans are being made to alleviate the congestion in this area.

-- Kathy Kelly, Watervliet

A: We've received several inquiries in recent weeks about traffic congestion at various points on Route 4 in Rensselaer County. We can't respond to them all, but we'll deal with one this week.

State Department of Transportation spokesman Peter Van Keuren says that town officials, the developer of the East Greenbush Technology Park and the staff at DOT all are aware of the traffic problems near Tech Valley Drive.

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