



Genesis of a Public Traffic Safety Product **By Michael A. Harrison** **President/CEO ~ LightGuard Systems, Inc.**

The year was 1991. I was enjoying a good living as a corporate pilot and Vice President of a medium sized residential home building firm in one of the most beautiful counties in the nation, Sonoma County, in Northern California. Then one day, a tragic accident involving a good friend changed nearly everything in my life, even though this incident didn't actually "involve" me in any way.

My friend, (A City Public Employee), was on his way home during a dreary misty late Holiday Season afternoon. Out of nowhere, an elderly man on his nightly routine for ice cream, was crossing in front of him... the man was fatally struck.

In 1992, In seeing the need for a better system than "two painted" lines in the street, and the heartbreak for a motorist who, like all of us, did not set out that day to kill anyone, I came up with an idea that I thought would give "The Motorist" a chance to recognize this potential conflict, so as to help avoid this type of incident and reduce injuries and deaths in the roadway systems.

That was the easy part... Taking an "idea" to having it become a standard traffic practice throughout the United States, was and enlightening experience, to say the least. I met with the Chief of Police of the city in which this incident occurred. We agreed that the city had the highest per capita rate of marked crosswalk deaths that year – "In the nation". We would like to be the ones to come up with a solution. After offering my "idea" of placing (somehow), lights imbedded along each side of the crosswalk to "alert the motorist" of a potential presence of a pedestrian – he said he would take this concept to the City Council for consideration. The Council gave a unanimous approval for testing this concept, and the concept of the LightGuard System, Inc. "Smart Crosswalk™" was born.

By direction of the Public Works Director, we were told that any "experimentation" of a traffic safety product must be approved by the California Traffic Control Devices Committee, (CTCDC) for "Authorization to Experiment". This committee was/is comprised of industry professionals, who reviewed new ideas, and or concepts, and forwarded the results and findings to the State of California Transportation Department, Caltrans.

We submitted our request to the committee and presented the concept to them at one of the three meetings per year that were scheduled. On October 14, 1993 after hearing our presentation along with demonstration "mock up – operational model", the Committee approved the Authorization to Experiment, with several "mandates" due to their professional concerns.

These mandates included the biggest fear of giving the pedestrian a "false sense of security" should they see the lights flashing and think they have clear passage. They requested that the lights be "designed to attempt to minimize visibility to the pedestrian." We were now "off and running"...