

Of Buggies and Blinkers: An Essay on the 2022 Ohio Buggy Lighting Law

Joseph F. Donnermeyer

Professor Emeritus/Academy Professor
School of Environment and Natural Resources
The Ohio State University
donnermeyer.1@gmail.com

Erik Wesner

Founder and Editor
Amish America (amishamerica.com)
ewesner@gmail.com

Dee Jepsen

Professor and State Agricultural Safety and Health Program Leader
College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences
The Ohio State University
jepsen.4@osu.edu

Abstract: Buggy safety long has been an issue in the state of Ohio and elsewhere. As the Amish population grows and rural roads become increasingly crowded with cars and trucks, safety will continue to be a concern to the Amish, public officials, and the general public. In 2022, the governor of Ohio signed a mandatory lighting law for Amish buggies. Even though a large share of the Amish either already had a blinking light on the back of their buggies or conformed to the new law, some conservative groups, especially Swartzentruber Amish groups, have resisted. This article discusses the history of attempts to increase buggy visibility and road safety and the developments behind the current controversy. It includes a brief statistical summary of the number of buggies in the Greater Holmes County settlement that either display a blinking amber light or do not, and describes short visits to other Amish and buggy-driving Mennonite groups in Ohio. Also included are selected comments about the new Ohio law posted by readers on the *Amish America* website. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the possible outcomes from an issue that will likely extend into 2024 and beyond before a solution is found for all Amish affiliations.

Submitted August 2, 2023; accepted September 21, 2023; published December 7, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.18061/jpac.v4i1.9605>

Keywords: buggy safety, SMV, Swartzentruber Amish, reflector tape

Ohio hosts the largest number of Amish settlements: 69 in mid-2023. Its Amish population is second in size only to Pennsylvania, with an estimated 84,000 people in Ohio (Young Center, 2023a). Its Amish settlements range in size from the gigantic Greater Holmes County and Greater Geauga County settlements to a number of small settlements with only a single church district (Young Center, 2023b). The Buckeye State is also host to several varieties of horse-and-buggy Mennonites, located primarily in the southwest (Stoltzfus, 2022, p. 185).



In addition to having a large, multi-billion-dollar agricultural economy that includes crops, livestock, fruit, and a host of other commodities (Becot et al., 2020), Ohio is a leader in safety initiatives related to horse-drawn buggies and slow-moving farm equipment on public roads, thanks to the efforts of the Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering (FABE) at the Ohio State University (OSU) and the Ohio State University Extension (OSUE).

Early Developments

Sixty years ago, faculty in what was then named the Department of Agricultural Engineering developed the six-sided orange reflective triangle¹ for slow-moving vehicles (SMV) traveling on public roads (Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering Sciences, 2023). See Figure 1. The triangle was primarily designed for vehicles traveling below 25 miles per hour (Jepsen & Calip, 2009; ANSI/ASAE, 2008). Its development was supported by the Automotive Safety Foundation (Zook, 1993, p. 147). By the early 1970s, both Canada and the United States had adopted the slow-moving vehicle emblem as a national standard (Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering Sciences, 2023).

Figure 1

SMV Emblem on a Buggy Used for Extension Education Programs



(Photo courtesy of Dee Jepsen and Joseph Donnermeyer)

Today, the SMV sign is used by nearly every country in the world and is one of the most universally recognized safety warning symbols. Mounted on the back of horse-drawn vehicles and farm equipment, it alerts car and truck drivers that a much slower moving vehicle is in front of them.

¹ The SMV placard is described as a six-sided triangle because the corners of the triangle are clipped, making a flat surface not a point. The red on the perimeter outlines the fluorescent orange center, which is an equilateral triangle.

Lighting options for buggies and wagons were developed using a color pattern similar to that found on automobiles and farm machinery. White headlights are recommended on the front and red taillights are recommended on the back of all vehicles. Amber flashing lights can also be mounted on each side of the buggy, visible to the front and the rear. For enhanced visibility, an amber flashing light can also be added to the top of the buggy. These recommendations were established by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) for horse-drawn vehicles (ANSI/ASAE, 2008).

The lives saved over the years by the SMV placard and by lights are inestimable. They are not without controversy, however. Even today, there is a very conservative set of Amish groups, the so-called Swartzentruber Amish, who feel that the bright, reflecting lights and marking materials are too worldly, violating their desire to live a religion-centered lifestyle based on humility (Zook, 1993, pp. 147–149). Citing their religious convictions that emphasize *Gelassenheit* (humility), they feel the SMV emblem is too colorful.

In the past, Swartzentruber and other conservative Amish groups who resisted using the SMV sign on the backs of their buggies while driving on public roads were pulled over by law enforcement, issued tickets, and sometimes sent to jail when they refused to pay their fines (Wagler, 1970). Eventually, as mandatory laws requiring the SMV sign on buggies, farm equipment, and other slow-moving vehicles came into force, conservative Amish either conformed to the new laws or agreed to use silver reflector tape as an alternative (Scott, 1981, p. 36).

Early studies at OSU's Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering pioneered the development and use of reflective material and lights to improve the visibility of buggies and prevent accidents on public roads. It was a collaborative effort of the Ohio State University Extension and invited law enforcement at both the state and local levels, and it included active consultation with various Amish leaders (Jepsen & Calip, 2009). Working together, they sought a practical and affordable solution to identify horse-drawn buggies and wagons, a strategy that Kraybill and Gilliam (2012, p. 247) refer to as a "cultural competent safety" approach. Demonstrations were conducted with side-by-side comparisons of buggies with no reflective material and buggies displaying the SMV sign and other lighting and marking patterns recommended in the ASABE standard. These visibility studies showed how soon a horse-drawn vehicle could be detected (in daytime and nighttime conditions) at various distances, such as 500 feet and 1,000 feet. Buggy shops in Amish communities were part of the early efforts to display the SMV emblem, reflective tape, and lights that were identified in the demonstration trials.

Town hall meetings were held around the state over the course of several years to present the lighting and marking information and hear the concerns of Amish buggy owners. Families attending the community meetings and other outreach events received free SMV emblems and rolls of reflective tape courtesy of funding provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and the Ohio Traffic Safety Office.

From these partnerships among OSU road safety specialists, Amish leaders, and law enforcement groups, various educational materials were developed to target both Amish and non-Amish drivers. For example, an Ohio State University Extension brochure titled "Driving Safely

in Amish Country”² informs readers about “closure time”; that is, the time required for a driver to recognize and then respond to the presence of a slow-moving buggy (or any vehicle traveling at less than 25 miles per hour). The brochure also informs readers about how different closure times are for a driver traveling at 55 miles per hour when approaching from behind either another motor vehicle traveling at 45 miles per hour or a buggy traveling at 5 miles per hour. According to the brochure, if the driver of the approaching vehicle first spots the vehicle ahead at 500 feet, the results will be dramatically different. A collision with the buggy will take place in only 6.5 seconds, while the two motor vehicles will still be 400 feet apart after the same 6.5 second elapse of time. Drivers of motor vehicles accustomed to coming upon slower-moving cars (e.g., those traveling 45 miles per hour) are likely to misjudge the dramatically different amount of time and space necessary to avoid a collision with a 5-mile-per-hour buggy and thus have a false sense of a safe distance for braking purposes (Bean et al., 2001).

In 2009, additional lighting and marking work was done by OSU FAGE faculty and students, specifically for low-profile vehicles used by Amish populations. Pony carts and wagons are different than their taller buggy counterparts. These vehicles are not seen as readily, especially when motorists crest a hill or come around a sharp turn. The resulting recommendation was for all pony carts to mount an aerial flag (i.e., a bicycle flag) 2 to 6 feet from the ground. The addition of the aerial flag was adopted into the ASABE standards in 2012.

Extension education programs continue to be given throughout Ohio. The increased number of Amish settlements and individuals, plus increased traffic on rural roads, make roadway safety efforts a continued priority. Figures 2 and 3 show displays that are often set up at auctions and other venues throughout the state. Figure 2 shows prototypes used for pony-cart marking with aerial flags. The visibility advantages are evident between a cart with an SMV emblem and red/orange reflective tape (left) compared to a cart with only silver tape (right). Figure 3 shows a life-size plywood mock-up of the back panel of a buggy with full safety paraphernalia, including the SMV emblem, an LED flashing light on the top center, reflector tape, rear taillights, and amber flashing lights.

² A copy of this brochure can found at <https://agsafety.osu.edu/sites/agsafety/files/imce/Drive%20Safely%20in%20Amish%20Country.pdf>.

Figure 2

Prototypes for Pony Cart Visibility



(Photo courtesy of Dee Jepsen and Joseph Donnermeyer)

Figure 3

Life-Size Mock-Up of the Back of a Buggy with Visibility Enhancements



(Photo courtesy of Dee Jepsen and Joseph Donnermeyer)

Recent Events

Despite all the attention paid to buggy safety in the past, two state legislators, Representatives Darrell Kick of Loudonville and Scott Wiggam of Wooster, remained concerned about the safety of Amish families in buggies and the emotional effects that crashing into a buggy can cause to drivers who injure and possibly kill a buggy's occupants (Karlovec, 2022). They proposed new legislation (House Bill 30) mandating a flashing amber light on the back and top of animal-drawn vehicles. After clearing both chambers of the legislature, the bill was signed into law in summer 2022 by Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. Until then, Ohio had recommended but not mandated a flashing light. Citing statistics from an Ohio Department of Transportation study, the legislators claim there were nearly 725 buggy crashes over the ten-year period from 2009 to 2019, with around half resulting in injury and 17 in fatalities. A large share occurred when a motor vehicle tried to pass a buggy, and most occurred during the day (Karlovec, 2022).

Ohio was not the first state to initiate a mandatory lighting law. Preceding Ohio's law by a few years was a Wisconsin law to the same effect (Wesner, 2018) and one passed in 2019 in Maine due to the new and increased presence of the Amish there (Miller, 2019). All Amish settlements in Maine were founded in the twenty-first century (Young Center, 2022b). Particularly interesting is the fact that the Maine law emerged from discussions with members of Amish settlements in Aroostook County, a large county bordering Canada that hosts several Swartzentruber Amish communities. The Maine legislation exempts Swartzentruber settlements from both the lights and the SMV sign, deeming it sufficient that those buggies include a light hanging from the left side of the buggy (Wesner, 2019). One news report quoted a state legislator claiming that he had "gone to extreme measures to ensure that this bill, should it become law, is supported by the Amish and is a considerable improvement in the area of traffic safety." The same legislator also observed that because the Amish presence in Maine is relatively new, there are numerous scary examples of cars and trucks coming up quickly and unexpectedly on buggies. Many of these incidents occur because drivers in rural Maine are not used to sharing the road with a horse and buggy (Miller, 2019).

Consultation with the Amish does not always happen. For example, a news article about the lighting law in Wisconsin mentioned that one county was considering mandates for buggies for such things as seat belts, car seats for children, insurance, and drivers' licenses, without considering if any of these requirements would meet approval from the Amish (Wesner, 2019). The most famous case in recent times occurred in Kentucky. Swartzentruber Amish in western Kentucky were issued tickets and some even served time in jail for refusing to use the SMV emblem ("Amish Buggies Exempt," 2012). Advocates for religious freedom came to the defense of the Amish, but the Kentucky Supreme Court struck down their claims of religious freedom. The state legislature then passed a bill that allows the Amish the option of silver reflector tape on the back of buggies if there are religiously based objections to the SMV emblem.

Dictates about SMV emblems, lighting, and reflector tape do not represent the first times that Amish-driven buggies have come into conflict with local and state laws. Sometimes the cases are laughable, such as when local officials attempted to mandate diapers for the collection of manure. In one case, a city council in northern Ohio proposed a diaper requirement for buggy horses coming

into town. The community soon became the butt of many jokes in the opening monologues of late night talk shows. The proposal was never brought up for a vote.

The current mandatory lighting bill in Ohio has clearly stated intentions, according to the two state representatives who initiated the legislation. The bill states that

no person shall operate an animal-drawn vehicle on a street or highway unless it is equipped with and displays, at all times, all of the following: (1) one yellow flashing lamp displaying yellow light that is visible from a distance of not less than one thousand feet and that is mounted in either of the following positions: (a) on the topmost portion of the rear of the animal-drawn vehicle; (b) on the top of the animal-drawn vehicle. (Wesner, 2022a)

The legislators mention that they consulted the Amish and cite letters they have received from Amish people. One letter makes this observation: “You are not asking for something that we don’t already have.” Another states, “For the buggy driver as well as the car driver which both are often innocent people who would like to see improvement in lighting on our buggies.” A member of a Swartzentruber Amish group makes this point: “Our hope is that the law does not press charges against the members of the church that are inocent [*sic*]. Because these members can not [*sic*] put more lighting on their buggies unless our bishop tells us” (Wesner, 2022a). Amish churches are congregational in their decision-making style for most issues related to church *Ordnung* (i.e., discipline). Usually, this discipline is reviewed semiannually by baptized members in the weeks before twice-a-year communion, during a church service known as the *Ordnungs Gmay*. However, the letter writer is noting that, for Swartzentrubers, specifics related to the visibility of buggies are not under the purview of any one church district: they are the collective decision of particular Swartzentruber subgroups, which the bishops communicate to the church districts (Kraybill et al., 2013, pp. 86–88).³

Indeed, from the beginning of the legislative process, observers expressed doubts that a flashing light would be universally adopted, especially among the Swartzentruber Amish, and that is what has happened. News reports of noncompliance quickly emerged, with local law enforcement and troopers from the Ohio Highway Patrol issuing citations in some Ohio localities (Wesner, 2022b). Even though citations were and continued to be issued in several places, the epicenter of resistance and enforcement is Ashland County, located in the northcentral part of the state. See Figure 4. Ashland County hosts part of one of the largest Swartzentruber communities (Young Center, 2022b), one that spills into the adjacent counties of Medina and Wayne. There, citations were issued by the Ashland County Sheriff Department, and during subsequent court

³ Most Amish church districts (of which there are now over 2,800) are relatively autonomous regarding what is included in their *Ordnung*. There is no national ecclesiastical hierarchy to dictate what is and is not allowed. It is up to the baptized members (adult men and women) of each church district, even though the ordained men (bishop, minister, deacon) may have more than average influence. These men are nominated by members and then selected by lot, in accordance with passages in the Acts of the Apostles (Kraybill et al., pp. 90–92).

appearances, the Amish pleaded no contest rather than admit guilt and pay the fines (Wesner, 2022c). The judge for the Ashland Municipal Court decided to put liens on their properties rather than send them to jail. We speculate that he realized sending large numbers of Amish people to jail would simply create unwanted media attention. It may also be that the judge wanted to give both the Amish and law enforcement more time to work out a solution (Wesner, 2022d). A letter written by one Amishman that was submitted to the court stated the following:⁴

I confess that we must show all proper respect to the Government and must honor it according to the teaching of Paul Roman 13 and pay tax, titles, tribute, and show every kind of obedience as long as they don't require anything against the conscience. When however they command something contrary to conscience or not according to the teaching of Jesus. The reason for me not having a battery operated light on my buggy like I know is required by the government of Ohio is...#2 my conscience: would not allow me to; #3 my faith: we should have faith in God and trust that he protects us if it is His will. I am afraid that if I start using the flashing light on my buggy it would do me harm spiritually as I could end up having more trust in the flashing light to protect me then [*sic*] in God.

Figure 4

Location of Ashland County, Ohio



(Credit: *Wikimedia.org*. Wikimedia Commons.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashland_County,_Ohio#/media/File:Map_of_Ohio_highlighting_Ashland_County.svg

⁴ Some light editing of the letter was done by the authors, mostly in terms of capitalization. A copy of the letter in its original handwritten form can be found in the blog post by Wesner (2022d).

The Ashland County situation remains in flux as of summer 2023, and that will likely stretch into 2024. On May 22 and 23, 2023, the municipal court judge issued “certificates of judgement” against a dozen Amish men who continue to refuse to pay fines for violating the buggy lighting law. Each violator was issued a certificate stating the amount they owed the court, an amount that will increase based on a fixed interest rate until the fines are paid. A news article quoted the judge as telling the Amish defendants, “The court is out of options and there’s no point in dragging you back here over and over again for hearings when nothing’s going to change” (Hart, 2023).

Meanwhile, in other parts of Ohio, enforcement has been more relaxed. In one northeast county that contains mostly mainstream Old Order Amish who are part of the large Greater Geauga County Amish settlement, the sheriff told Amish leaders that they already did a good job of making buggies visible, including the adoption of blinking lights, before the mandatory law came along. In essence, he said that there is no need to spend the sheriff department budget on the kind of enforcement that is apparently occurring in Ashland County (anonymous Plain community member, personal communication, March 2023).

Not only does enforcement of the mandatory lighting law vary from one law enforcement jurisdiction to another, Amish conformity to the law also varies. One of the authors, Joe Donnermeyer, travels frequently from Columbus, Ohio, to the Ohio Amish Library, which is part of the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center (Behalt) near Berlin, Ohio. Eleven such trips were made in the first six months of 2023, with the first one on January 10 and the eleventh on June 29. During those research trips, the number of buggies traveling on the road were counted and assigned to one of three groups: (a) buggies with a flashing light on the back; (b) buggies with no light on the back; and (c) buggies with no light on the back, but with a large, rectangular, off-white reflector plate about 1 ft. long and 6 in. wide mounted on the left side of the back. The large rectangular reflector is an attempt by Swartzentruber Amish to create an alternative to the flashing light, an alternative they hope will eventually be accepted by state and local officials (see Figures 5 and 6).

In addition to traveling the backroads of the Greater Holmes County settlement, Donnermeyer also made a visit to the Mt. Hope Auction on March 7. These twelve trips resulted in 351 observations of buggies traveling along public roads, plus 67 in the parking area of the Mt. Hope Auction. Of those observations, 345 (82.54%) buggies had a flashing red light mounted on the top part of the buggy, and only 19 had not turned it on. Fifty-two buggies (12.44%) had neither a light nor the reflector plate, and a mere 20 (4.78%) had the reflector plate. All 72 buggies without a light were Swartzentruber in style; that is, they had no windshield or rearview mirrors and were also missing various accoutrements found on most other buggies (Scott, 1981, pp. 65–66). Even buggies from another relatively conservative group known as the Dan Church or Andy Weaver Amish had flashing lights.

Figure 5

Contrasting Buggies Parked at a Business in the Greater Holmes County, Ohio, Settlement



(Photos courtesy of Joseph Donnermeyer)

Figure 6

Swartzentruber Buggies with White Reflector Plate in the Greater Holmes County, Ohio, Settlement



(Photos courtesy of Joseph Donnermeyer)

Of the nearly 290 church districts in the Greater Holmes County settlement (Raber & Raber, 2022), about 8% are affiliated with Swartzentruber groups. Yet, 17.22% of buggies seen on the

road did not display lights. The reason for the disproportionate percentage is that most of the observations were made in the northern half of the Greater Holmes County settlement, where the Swartzentruber population is concentrated. Interestingly, of the 72 Swartzentruber buggies that were observed, 27.78% (20 of the 72) had the rectangular plate installed as an alternative.

Additional observational trips were made to other communities. One was to Ashland County where, as expected, none of the 12 Swartzentruber buggies observed there had a blinking light. A trip to southwest Ohio in mid-May yielded observations in a variety of horse-and-buggy Plain groups beginning about 25 miles east of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. In that part of Ohio, despite the small size of the settlements, there is an amazing diversity of Plain groups, including several mainstream Old Order Amish communities, a Swartzentruber group, an Ashland group, a Stauffer Old Order Mennonite community, and a Hoover Mennonite community. Exact counts of buggies with or without a flashing light were not made, but the size of each community gives an indication of how many buggies may be there and whether or not they have adopted flashing lights.

The Old Order community of West Union is considered Midwest Mainstream (Stoltzfus, 2022, p. 392) with a similar *Ordnung* to that of a large share of church districts in the Greater Holmes County community. West Union consists of four church districts and about 115 households. On a Sunday drive, both church services were located. All of the buggies parked at both locations had rear lights. Although an exact count was not possible without being too intrusive, the estimated total number of buggies parked in the yards of the two host families was 70.

A drive on the backroads in this region on the following day confirmed that every horse-and-buggy community except the Swartzentruber group near Peeples, Ohio, has adopted the blinking rear buggy light. This includes the small settlement at Decatur that is part of a conservative group known as the Ashland Old Order Amish (Stoltzfus, 2022, p. 395). The Ashland Amish affiliation is similar to but a bit more conservative than the Dan Church (Andy Weaver Amish) in the Greater Holmes County settlement. Like them, the Decatur group, which includes only a dozen families, has the flashing light on their buggies.

Both horse-and-buggy Mennonite groups have no objections to a flashing light on their buggies. The Stauffer Mennonites originated as an Old Order group in 1845 in Pennsylvania (Scott, 1996, pp. 88–93). Since 1989, there has been a Stauffer Mennonite settlement near the small town of Bainbridge, which is about 25 miles north and east of the West Union Amish settlement. Purchasing eggs and a jar of raspberry jelly led to a conversation with an elderly Stauffer Mennonite couple on a Monday trip. The couple indicated complete acceptance of the flashing light in that community, which today includes about 120 families (Stoltzfus, 2022, p. 218).

A conservative group with a complicated history and various roots is the Noah Hoover Mennonites (Scott, 1996, p. 104), members of which founded a small settlement in 2010 near Winchester, Ohio, about 10 miles north and west of the West Union Old Order Amish group. Locally, the Hoover group is called the Sugar Tree community, named after a small, unincorporated place in the vicinity. There are now about 75 families in the community (Stoltzfus, 2022, p. 220). The Hoover group is distinctive for its strict stand on the nonuse of technologies that most other Amish and Plain Mennonite groups have accepted. Pulling into the driveway of a

Hoover residence where eggs were advertised resulted in an informative conversation with two young men who were bringing a buggy out of a barn. They readily gave permission for photos of the buggy and obligingly turned on the flashing light. One of the young men said, “We won’t use any kind of engine, but a battery-run flashing light is okay.” Figure 7 shows that buggy, an open carriage in keeping with their church *Ordnung*, which specifies no roofs regardless of the weather. Other visibility enhancements, including reflector tape in various places and rear lights, can be seen (plus a hitch for pulling a wagon).

Figure 7

Noah Hoover Buggy, Winchester (Sugar Tree), Ohio



(Photos courtesy of Joseph Donnermeyer)

Only the Swartzentruber settlement founded in 2006 near Peeples in northern Adams County (Stoltzfus, 2022, pp. 213–214) has not adopted the flashing light for the backs of their buggies. Figure 8 shows buggies from the Peeples community. The first image is a close-up of a Swartzentruber buggy parked at a business. It shows the mount for the large rectangular reflector plate. Figure 9 is a Swartzentruber buggy on the road near Peeples without the plate but with reflective tape. Both pictures demonstrate that the Swartzentrubers have adopted reflector tape, as first developed by safety experts in the Department of Agricultural Engineering at Ohio State University.

Figure 8

Swartzentruber Buggies from the Peeples, Ohio, Community



(Photos courtesy of Joseph Donnermeyer)

It should be noted that Swartzentruber Amish and other conservative Amish groups have demonstrated a willingness to adopt various visibility enhancements in addition to the reflective rectangle. In the Ellenboro, North Carolina, Swartzentruber Amish settlement, buggies feature two attention-drawing elements: a large white reflective rectangular block on the upper left (the road side) of the buggy, along with two “L” shaped strips of white reflective material (see Figure 9). The rectangle is more elongated than the one seen currently in the Holmes County community. The “L” strip complements other strips of reflective material affixed to the top and bottom of the back of the buggy.

Figure 9

Visibility Enhancements on Buggies. Clockwise from Top Left: Ellenboro, North Carolina; Ethridge, Tennessee; Randolph, Mississippi; and Kenton/Mt. Victory, Ohio



(Photos courtesy of Erik Wesner and Wayne Dellinger, OSU Extension)

A so-called PVC pipe solution is also shown in Figure 9. Two sections of PVC pipe, approximately 6 in. to 8 in. long, are attached to opposite sides of the back left buggy wheel. The PVC pipe reflects the light of oncoming cars at night with the motion creating an oscillating, blinker-like effect. This solution was first reported in 2017 in the Ashland County community; apparently it was an initiative from within the community. Then-fifty-four-year-old Levi Shetler of Ashland County had experienced his fourteenth car-buggy accident, one that took the life of a person traveling with him. The *Akron Beacon Journal* stated that “a three-member steering committee was established to help communicate with the public on safety-related issues” (Wesner, 2017a). The committee, which included Shetler, presented their enhancements to a reporter to

make them public (Wesner, 2017b). The PVC pipe solution has also been seen in the Ethridge, Tennessee, settlement, a community of Swartzentruber Amish, as well as in a related, similarly plain group. Other visibility solutions can also be seen in Figure 9: the photo from Randolph, Mississippi, shows inverted “L”s on both sides of the buggy and the photo from Kenton/Mt. Victory, Ohio, shows two vertical columns of reflectors with small spaces between each reflector.

It is unclear to what degree alternatives such as these, seen in practice to be acceptable by Swartzentruber Amish and other conservative Amish groups, were considered by those responsible for the Ohio law prior to its passage. The examples demonstrate that not only are Swartzentruber Amish willing to adopt enhancements that fit within their church rules and cultural norms, but that they have done so on their own initiative.

What Do Others Think?

The *Amish America* website often features posts about buggies and buggy technologies.⁵ The website also offers space for readers to post comments, and the new buggy lighting legislation has stimulated a variety of opinions. A sampling of the thoughts of non-Amish people on the buggy lighting law and buggy visibility follows.⁶ Two submissions were critical of the legislators, with both expressing similar sentiments, perhaps with the latter copying the same phrase from the former since the dates of their entries were less than a month apart.

This is just more “feel good” legislation that won’t create better drivers. And it has been passed at the expense of relationships and individuals rights. I wonder how we would feel if the Amish were lobbying for laws forcing us to live the way they do.

I have thought from the beginning that this law is nothing more than “feel good” legislation. These guys are just trying to come up with something so that they can say their time in office wasn’t a complete waste.

A number of commenters were critical of the Amish, some quite harshly:

When laws are enacted the person(s) affected are expected to comply. Why should the Amish be different? Tell them to make private roads through their farm (properties) that allow no vehicular traffic. They won’t need to comply with the law.... Don’t like it they have the freedom to leave just as does any other person.

⁵ A five-minute *Amish America* YouTube video discussing the visibility of Amish buggies can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcT8eoNIA_Q.

⁶ Names and exact dates of *Amish America* readers’ comments are not included to maintain their anonymity.

It isn't the job of the state patrol to babysit the Amish while they're on the road! If these Amish insist on breaking the law, so be it; tickets will be handed out or lives will be lost. It's their choice. It's no different from people refusing to wear seatbelts while driving.... Why should it be any different for the Amish? The Amish are breaking the law. That goes against biblical teachings.

Please don't defend these idiots. They are putting themselves, their children, other people, other people's children, and the horses in grave danger. As they have been doing. They can go live outside of America if they don't want to follow the rules of the country. They aren't "special."

Implement the rules and if not obeyed the repercussion is that you may not use nor enjoy that what you decided to not abide by. This really isn't difficult. The buggies and horses stay in the barn and the Amish start walking to wherever they want to go to.

Other commenters were sympathetic to the Amish, asserting that cars and trucks are driven too fast on rural roads and often the drivers are not paying attention. The first comment shows the emotional trauma of witnessing the aftermath of a car-buggy accident and the other three blame those who drive negligently.

I've seen first-hand what a speeding car can do to a family in a four-seat wagon drawn by two horses. The car passed me a short time before it hit the wagon. One woman was killed; the near horse had to be destroyed. Other members of the extended family all had various injuries including broken bones, and one woman was miscarrying on the spot. This was broad daylight. The driver of the car went on.

Are people slowing down to follow the speed limit? Many still speed. Are people putting down the cell phone while driving? Many still drink and drive.... And people want to complain about the horse and buggy? Maybe there are too many cars on the road with irresponsible drivers.

This is not an Amish problem, this is an automobile stupid driver problem. Pay attention, slow down and don't outrun your headlights.

Sometime people just don't pay attention to buggies even if they have all kinds of reflective strips, reflective triangle, light, and turn signals. My one neighbor got hit with all this on his buggy.

Then there are the comments of those who hope for a solution.

Were any Amish involved in this decision-making process? I would suggest inviting bishops to discuss their ideas. If some type of demonstration of different options could be made to the bishops, then they would be better able to offer ideas or recommendations.

I'm all for promoting greater safety. Since there are solutions other Swartzentruber communities have accepted, it seems logical to ask local Amish folks to adopt those measures if they refuse the flashing light. I hope everyone in the community can keep the focus on creating safer roads.

Final Thoughts

Kraybill and Gilliam (2012) provide useful advice for the design of safety programs in Plain communities. Although their comments were focused on the safety of children, the advice is quite pertinent to anyone or any organization attempting to work with buggy-driving groups, both Amish and Mennonite. First on their list is the idea that has topped all efforts, past and present, around buggy safety, namely, the value of face-to-face communication to reach reasonable solutions. To quote Kraybill and Gilliam (2012, p. 249):

Because the Old Order communities have many cultural differences and no centralized hierarchy, all interventions require voluntary support by local members based on face-to-face interaction with safety experts such as teachers, nurses, or agricultural extension agents.

The advice about face-to-face interaction was certainly followed when the reflective tape options were developed over 30 years ago in the Department of Agricultural Engineering at the Ohio State University. Evidence for the effectiveness of this option can be seen anywhere there is an Amish settlement in Ohio. Silver reflector tape is now universally adopted, even on Swartzentruber buggies.

Fortunately, lights were already widely adopted by numerous Amish and buggy-driving Mennonites in Ohio; hence, the legislation was not resisted to any significant extent except among the conservative Swartzentruber groups. That so many varieties of Plain Anabaptist groups utilize the lights weakens the argument that objections are based on general Amish religious beliefs rather than on the specific interpretation of a certain affiliation and its bishops. Yet, it is possible that, as in Kentucky more than a decade ago, the Ohio legislature could pass legislation exempting Swartzentruber Amish.

With many more months and maybe even years to play out for this issue, there are at least three possible outcomes. First, Swartzentruber groups may eventually conform because the penalties for citations, fines with accumulated interest, and jail will become too disruptive to church and

community life. Second, state and local authorities may eventually relax strict enforcement of the lighting law, perhaps in part because of unwanted, negative media attention. Third, a compromise may be reached, such as allowing the adoption of the rectangular reflective plate as an alternative to a flashing light and the SMV emblem—although this option has not been tested nor accepted by ASABE and may take a lengthy study to prove its effectiveness. Whatever alternative is devised, it could be encoded in state law, defining the appropriate kinds of visibility technologies. The current ASABE standards allow for a variety of patterns and options, and state law determine how these recommended practices are included in their statutes. Earlier adoption in Ohio Amish communities of the SMV emblem, lights, and reflective tape was successfully accomplished using a series of town hall meetings and community demonstrations. The more face-to-face contact with Swartzentruber leaders and community stakeholders can be incorporated into the process, rather than legislative fiat, the more likely a successful outcome.

Whatever solutions and compromises are reached, will this end the issue of road safety in areas where the Amish and other faith groups who rely on horse-and-buggies travel and share the road with much faster motor vehicles live? Likely not. E-bikes, golf carts, tractors, and other means of transportation that members of some Plain Anabaptist groups now use on public roads present fresh public safety challenges. In a sense, road safety was and will remain a challenge for everyone, as it has since John William Lambert, an early American automobile manufacturer, slammed into a hitching post in one of his experimental horseless carriage models in Van Wert County, Ohio, in 1891 (Perl, n.d.).

References

- Amish buggies exempt from orange stickers under new Kentucky law. (2012, March 27). *The Mercury News*. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2012/03/27/amish-buggies-exempt-from-orange-stickers-under-new-kentucky-law/>
- ANSI/ASAE (2008). *Lighting and marking of animal-drawn equipment*. ASAE Standards, American Society of Agricultural Engineers (ASAE), EP576.1.
- Bean, T. L., Yarosh, A. J., Lawrence, T. J., & James, R. E. (2001). *Driving safely in Amish country*. Ohio State University Extension. <https://agsafety.osu.edu/sites/agsafety/files/imce/Drive%20Safely%20in%20Amish%20Country.pdf>
- Becot, F., Inwood, S., Jackson-Smith, D., & Katchova, A. (2020). *The status and changing face of Ohio agriculture: Summary of Ohio farm trends 1997–2017*. College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, SENR Technical Report. Ohio State University. <https://senr.osu.edu/ohiofarmtrends>
- Department of Food, Agricultural, and Biological Engineering (2023). *Slow moving vehicle sign: A historical perspective of the SMV emblem*. Ohio State University. <https://fabe.osu.edu/node/1377>

- Hart, N. (2023, May 23). 12 more certificates of judgement ordered against Amish who refuse to pay fines. *Ashland Source*. https://www.ashlandsource.com/news/12-more-certificates-of-judgement-ordered-against-amish-who-refuse-to-pay-fines/article_eb8b2a5c-f99b-11ed-85a8-e3277b3c0915.html
- Jepsen, S. D., & Calip, T. (2009). Lighting and marking recommendations for buggies and wagons. Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet AEX-596.4-09. <https://agsafety.osu.edu/sites/agsafety/files/imce/Lighting%20and%20Marking%20Recommendations%20for%20Buggies%20and%20Wagons.pdf>
- Karlovec, J. (2022, August 26). Law requiring flashing lights on Amish buggies takes effect Aug. 31. *Geauga County Maple Leaf*. <https://www.geugamapleleaf.com/news/law-requiring-flashing-lights-on-amish-buggies-takes-effect-aug-31/>
- Kraybill, D. B., & Gilliam, J. M. (2012). Culturally competent safety interventions for children in Old Order Anabaptist communities. *Journal of Agromedicine*, 17(2), 247–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2012.658303>
- Kraybill, D. B., Johnson-Weiner, K. M., & Nolt, S. M. (2013). *The Amish*. Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://doi.org/10.56021/9781421409146>
- Miller, K. (2019, March 19). Lawmakers aim to balance safety, Amish beliefs with buggy bill. *Portland Herald Press*. <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/03/12/lawmakers-consider-requiring-amish-buggies-to-display-reflectors-or-lights/>
- Perl, H. (n.d.). When and where was the first automobile accident? Improv. <https://www.myimprov.com/first-automobile-accident/#:~:text=First%20Car%20Versus%20Bicycle,race%20in%20New%20York%20City.>
- Raber, A., & Raber, M. (2022). *The new American almanac: The fifty-third edition for the year of our Lord 2023*. Aden and Mary Raber.
- Scott, S. (1981). *Plain buggies: Amish, Mennonite, and Brethren horse-drawn transportation*. Good Books.
- Scott, S. (1996). *An introduction to Old Order and conservative Mennonite groups*. Good Books.
- Stoltzfus, J. (2022). *Amish & Mennonite settlements of America: A guide to North America's horse and buggy groups and a directory of Die Botschaft scribes*. Masthof.
- Wagler, D. (1970, July). Not afraid of persecution. *Family Life*, 10–12.
- Wesner, E. (2017a, February 14). Ohio Amishman has survived 14 buggy accidents. *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/ohio-amishman-has-survived-14-buggy-accidents/>
- Wesner, E. (2017b, May 2). Swartzentruber Amish testing unusual buggy visibility solution. *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/swartzentruber-amish-testing-unusual-buggy-visibility-solution/>
- Wesner, E. (2018, May 29). Wisconsin Amish agree to add buggy lighting. *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/wisconsin-amish-agree-to-add-buggy-lighting>

- Wesner, E. (2022a, June 9). New Ohio law requires flashing light atop buggies. Will all Amish comply? *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/new-ohio-law-flashing-light-buggies-will-amish-comply/>
- Wesner, E. (2022b, June 21). Surprise, no surprise: Some Amish ignoring Ohio buggy light law. *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/surprise-some-amish-ignoring-ohio-buggy-light-law/>
- Wesner, E. (2022c, October 20). As expected: Amish cited for buggy light violations, refuse to pay fines. *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/amish-cited-for-buggy-violations-refuse-fines-ohio/>
- Wesner, E. (2022d, November 10). Judge discusses prison for Amish after new citations; letter from Amishman Harvey Hostetler. *Amish America*. <https://amishamerica.com/judge-discusses-prison-for-amish-after-new-citations/>
- Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. (2023a). *Amish Population, 2023*. <https://groups.etown.edu/amishstudies/statistics/population-2023/#tables>
- Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. (2023b). *Amish Population in the United States by State, County, and Settlement, 2023*. https://groups.etown.edu/amishstudies/files/2022/07/Amish-Pop-2022_by_state_and_county.pdf
- Zook, L. J. (1993). Slow-moving vehicles. In Kraybill, D. B. (Ed.), *The Amish and the state* (pp. 145–162). Johns Hopkins University Press.