

Dazzled by xenon headlamps? Tough luck, says Government

Further to Howard Redwood's articles in *Driving magazine* on the recurring problem and danger of drivers being dazzled by xenon headlamps, the Government has now responded to the on-line petition.

The petition, submitted by Ken Perham, asked the Government to revise the regulation about dazzling other drivers contained in the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989. Schedule 4, Part 1, Section 4 of the RVL 1989 states clearly that lights must not be set to dazzle other drivers.

Ken Perham's petition went on to say that new xenon lights are 30% brighter than normal lights and are becoming a growing menace nationwide. Many of them blind, dazzle, and paralyse the eyes of other road users, making driving at night more difficult for most and impossible for those with light sensitive eyes.

The petition said the current act is clearly out of date and is in need of revision to make it safer for the majority.

There were 540 signatures, of which a quarter were Approved Driving Instructors.

Here is the Government response:

"Vehicle headlamps are designed to comply with European regulations which require a beam pattern designed to avoid dazzle to other road users. Gas-discharge (Xenon) headlamps are significantly brighter than their halogen equivalent which improves driver's view of the road at night, including pedestrians. However, they must still be designed to minimise dazzle to other drivers.

"The requirements above are only effective if the headlamp is correctly aimed. The Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations require the lamps to be adjusted to avoid dazzle and discomfort to other road users and enforcement bodies, such as the police, can take appropriate action if they feel that glare from a headlamp is a danger to others.

"The MOT ensures vehicles over three years old are checked yearly but the driver is still responsible for maintaining the correct aim. This is especially important if a light source is replaced which can influence the setting of the headlamp.

"The Department believes that the above requirements are sufficient to ensure driver safety, however we will continue to ensure that dazzle is considered during the development of the European lighting regulations. We will also continue to identify opportunities to allow new technologies on to the market that will further improve headlamp performance."

So that's all right then. European regulations already say that headlamps shouldn't dazzle other road users, so even if xenon headlamps on brand new cars blind anyone daft enough to look at them, there can't possibly be a problem. And if the RVL already says lights have got to be correctly aimed, there's absolutely no need to do anything about drivers being dazzled off the road by xenon headlamps. And "technologies ... that will further improve headlamp performance" sounds disconcertingly like xenon headlamps are genuinely considered to be an improvement. The existing regulations are sufficient to ensure driver safety, they say, so everything is all right.

What rubbish. Watch this space.