

Celebrate White Cane Safety Day – October 15

History of White Canes and White Cane Safety Day

Around the world, white canes are used by blind and visually impaired people to guide themselves in their travels. In 1921, James Briggs of Bristol, England, used a white cane to let pedestrians and vehicle traffic know he was blind. He chose to paint his cane white so it would be visible even at night. About ten years later, his cane design was standardized by Guilly d'Herbemont of France when 5,000 white canes were sent to blind French citizens and veterans from the First World War.

In the United States, George Bonham observed a blind man using a black cane. Bonham proposed painting the cane white with a red stripe to make it more noticeable. The first white cane laws were passed in 1930 in Bonham's hometown of Peoria, Illinois. Today, every state has a White Cane Law. It is estimated that 109,000 of the 1.3 million legally blind people in the United States use a white cane.

In the 1940s blind veterans returning home from the Second World War received white canes. In 1944, Richard E. Hoover, a veteran rehabilitation specialist, established the "Hoover Method," a technique of holding a long cane in the center of the body and swinging it back and forth before each step to detect obstacles. Today, this technique is called sweeping.

In 1963, the National Federation of the Blind sought to have White Cane Safety Day proclaimed as recognition of the rights of blind and visually impaired persons. Congress on October 6, 1964, authorized President Johnson to proclaim October 15 as White Cane Safety Day. The Lions Clubs International celebrate White Cane Day as Sight Conservation Day.