



SIGN INSTALLATION POLICY

Children at Play Signs

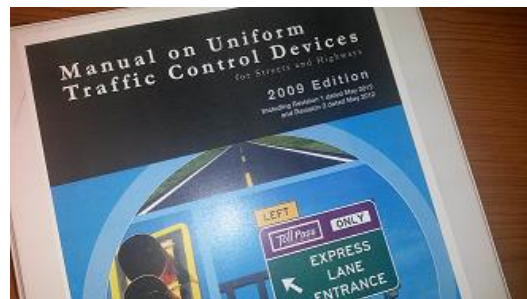


Although not as commonly requested as in the past (for a variety of reasons), “Children at Play” signs – or variations on that same message: “Slow Children at Play”, “[running child image] at Play”, “Watch for Children”, etc. have been asked-for by parents concerned about the safety of children playing in/around their neighborhoods.

The Federally-adopted Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) states the following about warning signs:

“The purpose of a warning sign is to provide advance warning to the road user of unexpected conditions on or adjacent to the roadway that might not be readily apparent.”

Section 5.01 “Introduction” Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways, 2009, Federal Highway Administration



Municipal Policy on Children at Play Signs:

“Children at Play” signs are not recognized by the State of Alaska or the Federal Highway Administration as official traffic control devices – and are no longer installed on public streets in Anchorage. These signs have been installed in the past throughout the Municipality of Anchorage; however, the signs that are installed in neighborhoods are being left in place until they are no longer serviceable (as is permitted by the MUTCD), or, until maintenance is performed on the associated speed limit signs. At that time, the “Children at Play” signs will be removed.



Public agencies across the United States have taken a similar position that these signs should be removed, and, in fact, the removal of these signs should carry a high priority.

These signs are deceiving and ineffective. Drivers already have a reasonable expectation of the presence of children in residential areas – especially at certain times of the day and/or days of the week. Studies have demonstrated that the signs do nothing to increase safety – and, in fact – can provide an additional distraction to drivers. Over-signage – particularly along residential streets where there is already considerable demand for driver attention – results in an additional distraction to motorists. That incremental distraction can be a problem for the safety of pedestrians in, near, or crossing the roadway and the safe movement of cars into and out of driveways.



A study by the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (CCHRP) – part of the Transportation Research Board – reported that nearly 80 percent of the crashes involving children resulted from an unsafe or illegal act by the child. The report concluded that no traffic control device could be expected to protect a child.

The NCHRP provided reports in “Synthesis of Highway Practice No. 139 Pedestrians and Traffic Control Measures” (1988) and Synthesis of Highway Practice No. 186 Supplemental Advance Warning Devices” (1993) that indicated “Non-uniform signs such as ‘Caution – Children at Play’, ‘Slow – Children at Play’, ‘Slow – Children’ or similar legends should not be permitted at any time... the removal of any non-standard signs should carry a high priority.”

Pediatric trauma physicians have cited the studies, and concur that children – particularly young children – should actively be discouraged from playing near, or on, streets and that adults have the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of their children in/near their homes.

Even into their teens, children have difficulty judging the approach speeds of oncoming vehicles. Association of Psychological Sciences, based in London, <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/22/4/429.full.pdf+html>, make a finding that “Our study is the first to demonstrate that the neural mechanisms for detection of looming [oncoming traffic] are not fully developed until adulthood.”

Addressing the Safety of Young Children:

Unnecessary signs confuse and annoy drivers and foster a disrespect for all signs. Signs used in accordance with the Federal MUTCD can and should be posted for school zones and pedestrian crossings, as well as near established playgrounds and other recreational areas, where a need exists.

The Muni has an active Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program, however, to determine if motorists are driving at an inappropriate speed, or if there is a significant amount of non-local traffic using the neighborhood streets. This program can be an effective means of addressing the concerns that parents and families may have.

Parents have a vital role in providing for their childrens’ safety – and may, in fact, be the most effective means of addressing safety concerns. They have the ability to teach children that it is not safe to play in/near the street, and to discourage children from doing so without adult supervision.

Parents, however, should resist the temptation to purchase these signs from on-line sources, however, and install the signs in or near the public road. Under Alaska State law, it is illegal for anyone other than the Municipal Traffic Engineer to post signs – whether on public or private property – that attempt to regulate or control traffic on an abutting public roadway.

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