



# Illinois Department of Transportation

2300 South Dirksen Parkway / Springfield, Illinois / 62764

June 22, 2011

## **CIRCULAR LETTER 2011-08**

### **CHILDREN WARNING SIGNS**

COUNTY ENGINEERS/SUPERINTENDENTS OF HIGHWAYS  
MUNICIPAL ENGINEERS/DIRECTORS OF PUBLIC WORKS/MAYORS  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS

Children warning signs should not be used since they may encourage children to play in the street and may encourage parents to be less vigilant. Such signs also provide no guidance to motorists as to a safe speed, and the sign has no legal basis for determining what a motorist should do. Furthermore, motorists should expect children to be at play in all residential areas, and the lack of signing on some streets may indicate otherwise. The signs are unenforceable and act as another roadside obstacle to pedestrians and errant motorists. Use of these nonstandard signs may also imply that the involved jurisdiction approves of streets as playgrounds, which may result in the jurisdiction being vulnerable to tort liability.

The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), Section 2A.06 Design of Signs, Paragraph 09, requires "All symbols shall be unmistakably similar to, or mirror images of, the adopted symbol signs, all of which are shown in the Standard Highway Signs and Markings book (see Section 1A.11). Symbols and colors shall not be modified unless otherwise provided in this Manual. All symbols and colors for signs not shown in the Standard Highway Signs and Markings book shall follow the procedures for experimentation and change described in Section 1A.10."

Neither the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices nor the Standard Highway Signs and Marking book provide a standard symbol warning sign for the following Slow Children Playing or Slow Children at Play signs. Therefore, these signs are not in compliance with the MUTCD.



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The MUTCD, Section 2A.06 Design of Signs, Paragraph 13, allows "State and local highway agencies may develop special word message signs in situations where roadway conditions make it necessary to provide road users with additional regulatory, warning, or guidance information, such as when road users need to be notified of special regulations or warned about a situation that might not be readily apparent." However, the MUTCD, Section 2A.04, Paragraph 01, recommends "Regulatory and warning signs should be used conservatively because these signs, if used to excess, tend to lose their effectiveness."

Other word message warning signs dealing with children such as "Autistic Child," "Blind Child," "Deaf Child" or "Children at Play" are not recommended. These types of warning signs:

- Do not describe where the child might be;
- No longer attract the attention of motorists after initial installation;
- Have no legal meaning;
- Provide parents and children with a false sense of security;
- Are often left in place after the child is grown or moved away;
- Lack established procedures for engineering judgment or study; and
- Have proven ineffective.

The MUTCD Section 2C.49 Vehicular Traffic Warning Signs and Section 2C.50 Non-Vehicular Warning Signs provide the requirements for Bicycle (W11-1), Pedestrian (W11-2), Handicapped (W11-9), Bicycle/Pedestrians (W11-15), and Playground (W15-1) warning symbol signs. These signs should be considered as an alternative to the word message signs if engineering judgment warrants a warning sign and the location being considered for the sign complies with MUTCD requirements.

Please contact the Local Policy and Technology Unit at [DOT.LocalPolicy@illinois.gov](mailto:DOT.LocalPolicy@illinois.gov) with any questions.

Sincerely,



Darrell W. Lewis, P. E.  
Acting Engineer of Local Roads and Streets

Attachments

# PART 2

## SIGNS

### CHAPTER 2A. GENERAL

#### Section 2A.01 Function and Purpose of Signs

Support:

- 01 This Manual contains Standards, Guidance, and Options for the signing of all types of highways, and private roads open to public travel. The functions of signs are to provide regulations, warnings, and guidance information for road users. Words, symbols, and arrows are used to convey the messages. Signs are not typically used to confirm rules of the road.
- 02 Detailed sign requirements are located in the following Chapters of Part 2:
- Chapter 2B — Regulatory Signs, Barricades, and Gates
  - Chapter 2C — Warning Signs and Object Markers
  - Chapter 2D — Guide Signs for Conventional Roads
  - Chapter 2E — Guide Signs for Freeways and Expressways
  - Chapter 2F — Toll Road Signs
  - Chapter 2G — Preferential and Managed Lane Signs
  - Chapter 2H — General Information Signs
  - Chapter 2I — General Service Signs
  - Chapter 2J — Specific Service (Logo) Signs
  - Chapter 2K — Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs
  - Chapter 2L — Changeable Message Signs
  - Chapter 2M — Recreational and Cultural Interest Area Signs
  - Chapter 2N — Emergency Management Signs

**Standard:**

- 03 **Because the requirements and standards for signs depend on the particular type of highway upon which they are to be used, the definitions for freeway, expressway, conventional road, and special purpose road given in Section 1A.13 shall apply in Part 2.**

#### Section 2A.02 Definitions

Support:

- 01 Definitions and acronyms that are applicable to signs are given in Sections 1A.13 and 1A.14.

#### Section 2A.03 Standardization of Application

Support:

- 01 It is recognized that urban traffic conditions differ from those in rural environments, and in many instances signs are applied and located differently. Where pertinent and practical, this Manual sets forth separate recommendations for urban and rural conditions.

*Guidance:*

- 02 *Signs should be used only where justified by engineering judgment or studies, as provided in Section 1A.09.*
- 03 *Results from traffic engineering studies of physical and traffic factors should indicate the locations where signs are deemed necessary or desirable.*
- 04 *Roadway geometric design and sign application should be coordinated so that signing can be effectively placed to give the road user any necessary regulatory, warning, guidance, and other information.*

**Standard:**

- 05 **Each standard sign shall be displayed only for the specific purpose as prescribed in this Manual. Determination of the particular signs to be applied to a specific condition shall be made in accordance with the provisions set forth in Part 2. Before any new highway, private road open to public travel (see definition in Section 1A.13), detour, or temporary route is opened to public travel, all necessary signs shall be in place. Signs required by road conditions or restrictions shall be removed when those conditions cease to exist or the restrictions are withdrawn.**

#### Section 2A.04 Excessive Use of Signs

*Guidance:*

- 01 *Regulatory and warning signs should be used conservatively because these signs, if used to excess, tend to lose their effectiveness. If used, route signs and directional guide signs should be used frequently because their use promotes efficient operations by keeping road users informed of their location.*

## Section 2A.05 Classification of Signs

### Standard:

- 01 **Signs shall be defined by their function as follows:**
- A. **Regulatory signs give notice of traffic laws or regulations.**
  - B. **Warning signs give notice of a situation that might not be readily apparent.**
  - C. **Guide signs show route designations, destinations, directions, distances, services, points of interest, and other geographical, recreational, or cultural information.**

### Support:

- 02 Object markers are defined in Section 2C.63.

## Section 2A.06 Design of Signs

### Support:

- 01 This Manual shows many typical standard signs and object markers approved for use on streets, highways, bikeways, and pedestrian crossings.
- 02 In the specifications for individual signs and object markers, the general appearance of the legend, color, and size are shown in the accompanying tables and illustrations, and are not always detailed in the text.
- 03 Detailed drawings of standard signs, object markers, alphabets, symbols, and arrows (see Figure 2D-2) are shown in the “Standard Highway Signs and Markings” book. Section 1A.11 contains information regarding how to obtain this publication.
- 04 The basic requirements of a sign are that it be legible to those for whom it is intended and that it be understandable in time to permit a proper response. Desirable attributes include:
- A. High visibility by day and night; and
  - B. High legibility (adequately sized letters, symbols, or arrows, and a short legend for quick comprehension by a road user approaching a sign).
- 05 Standardized colors and shapes are specified so that the several classes of traffic signs can be promptly recognized. Simplicity and uniformity in design, position, and application are important.

### Standard:

- 06 **The term legend shall include all word messages and symbol and arrow designs that are intended to convey specific meanings.**
- 07 **Uniformity in design shall include shape, color, dimensions, legends, borders, and illumination or retroreflectivity.**
- 08 **Standardization of these designs does not preclude further improvement by minor changes in the proportion or orientation of symbols, width of borders, or layout of word messages, but all shapes and colors shall be as indicated.**
- 09 **All symbols shall be unmistakably similar to, or mirror images of, the adopted symbol signs, all of which are shown in the “Standard Highway Signs and Markings” book (see Section 1A.11). Symbols and colors shall not be modified unless otherwise provided in this Manual. All symbols and colors for signs not shown in the “Standard Highway Signs and Markings” book shall follow the procedures for experimentation and change described in Section 1A.10.**

### Option:

- 10 Although the standard design of symbol signs cannot be modified, the orientation of the symbol may be changed to better reflect the direction of travel, if appropriate.

### Standard:

- 11 **Where a standard word message is applicable, the wording shall be as provided in this Manual.**
- 12 **In situations where word messages are required other than those provided in this Manual, the signs shall be of the same shape and color as standard signs of the same functional type.**

### Option:

- 13 State and local highway agencies may develop special word message signs in situations where roadway conditions make it necessary to provide road users with additional regulatory, warning, or guidance information, such as when road users need to be notified of special regulations or warned about a situation that might not be readily apparent. Unlike colors that have not been assigned or symbols that have not been approved for signs, new word message signs may be used without the need for experimentation.

02 The Circular Intersection (W2-6) symbol sign (see Figure 2C-9) may be installed in advance of a circular intersection (see Figures 2B-21 through 2B-23).

*Guidance:*

03 *If an approach to a roundabout has a statutory or posted speed limit of 40 mph or higher, the Circular Intersection (W2-6) symbol sign should be installed in advance of the circular intersection.*

*Option:*

04 An educational plaque (see Figure 2C-9) with a legend such as ROUNDABOUT (W16-17P) or TRAFFIC CIRCLE (W16-12P) may be mounted below a Circular Intersection symbol sign.

05 The relative importance of the intersecting roadways may be shown by different widths of lines in the symbol.

06 An advance street name plaque (see Section 2C.58) may be installed above or below an Intersection Warning sign.

*Guidance:*

07 *The Intersection Warning sign should illustrate and depict the general configuration of the intersecting roadway, such as cross road, side road, T-intersection, or Y-intersection.*

08 *Intersection Warning signs, other than the Circular Intersection (W2-6) symbol sign and the T-intersection (W2-4) symbol sign should not be used on approaches controlled by STOP signs, YIELD signs, or signals.*

09 *If an Intersection Warning sign is used where the side roads are not opposite of each other, the Offset Side Roads (W2-7) symbol sign (see Figure 2C-9) should be used instead of the Cross Road symbol sign.*

10 *If an Intersection Warning sign is used where two closely-spaced side roads are on the same side of the highway, the Double Side Roads (W2-8) symbol sign (see Figure 2C-9) should be used instead of the Side Road symbol sign.*

11 *No more than two side road symbols should be displayed on the same side of the highway on a W2-7 or W2-8 symbol sign, and no more than three side road symbols should be displayed on a W2-7 or W2-8 symbol sign.*

*Support:*

12 Figure 2A-4 shows the typical placement of an Intersection Warning sign.

### **Section 2C.47 Two-Direction Large Arrow Sign (W1-7)**

**Standard:**

01 **The Two-Direction Large Arrow (W1-7) sign (see Figure 2C-9) shall be a horizontal rectangle.**

02 **If used, it shall be installed on the far side of a T-intersection in line with, and at approximately a right angle to, traffic approaching from the stem of the T-intersection.**

03 **The Two-Direction Large Arrow sign shall not be used where there is no change in the direction of travel such as at the beginnings and ends of medians or at center piers.**

04 **The Two-Direction Large Arrow sign directing traffic to the left and right shall not be used in the central island of a roundabout.**

*Guidance:*

05 *The Two-Direction Large Arrow sign should be visible for a sufficient distance to provide the road user with adequate time to react to the intersection configuration.*

### **Section 2C.48 Traffic Signal Signs (W25-1, W25-2)**

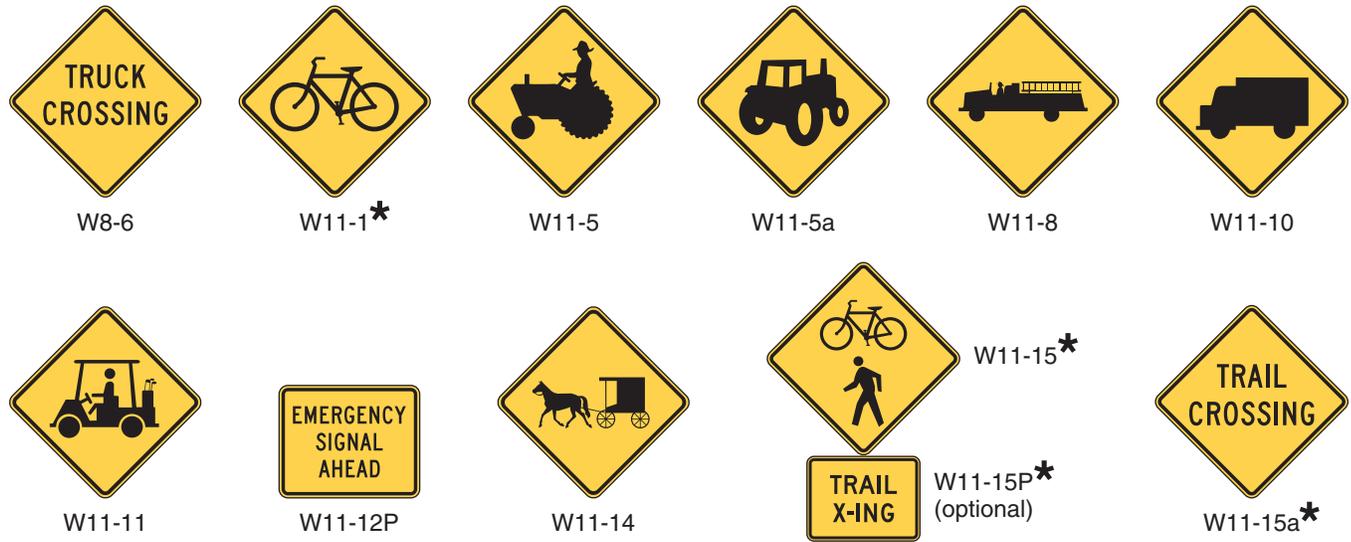
**Standard:**

01 **At locations where either a W25-1 or a W25-2 sign is required based on the provisions in Section 4D.05, the W25-1 or W25-2 sign (see Figure 2C-9) shall be installed near the left-most signal head. The W25-1 and W25-2 signs shall be vertical rectangles.**

### **Section 2C.49 Vehicular Traffic Warning Signs (W8-6, W11-1, W11-5, W11-5a, W11-8, W11-10, W11-11, W11-12P, W11-14, W11-15, and W11-15a)**

*Option:*

01 Vehicular Traffic Warning (W8-6, W11-1, W11-5, W11-5a, W11-8, W11-10, W11-11, W11-12P, W11-14, W11-15, and W11-15a) signs (see Figure 2C-10) may be used to alert road users to locations where unexpected entries into the roadway by trucks, bicyclists, farm vehicles, emergency vehicles, golf carts, horse-drawn vehicles, or other vehicles might occur. The TRUCK CROSSING (W8-6) word message sign may be used as an alternate to the Truck Crossing (W11-10) symbol sign.

**Figure 2C-10. Vehicular Traffic Warning Signs and Plaques**

\* A fluorescent yellow-green background color may be used for this sign or plaque.

#### Support:

- 02 These locations might be relatively confined or might occur randomly over a segment of roadway.

#### Guidance:

- 03 *Vehicular Traffic Warning signs should be used only at locations where the road user's sight distance is restricted, or the condition, activity, or entering traffic would be unexpected.*
- 04 *If the condition or activity is seasonal or temporary, the Vehicular Traffic Warning sign should be removed or covered when the condition or activity does not exist.*

#### Option:

- 05 The combined Bicycle/Pedestrian (W11-15) sign may be used where both bicyclists and pedestrians might be crossing the roadway, such as at an intersection with a shared-use path. A TRAIL X-ING (W11-15P) supplemental plaque (see Figure 2C-10) may be mounted below the W11-15 sign. The TRAIL CROSSING (W11-15a) sign may be used to warn of shared-use path crossings where pedestrians, bicyclists, and other user groups might be crossing the roadway.
- 06 The W11-1, W11-15, and W11-15a signs and their related supplemental plaques may have a fluorescent yellow-green background with a black legend and border.
- 07 Supplemental plaques (see Section 2C.53) with legends such as AHEAD, XX FEET, NEXT XX MILES, or SHARE THE ROAD may be mounted below Vehicular Traffic Warning signs to provide advance notice to road users of unexpected entries.

#### Guidance:

- 08 *If used in advance of a pedestrian and bicycle crossing, a W11-15 or W11-15a sign should be supplemented with an AHEAD or XX FEET plaque to inform road users that they are approaching a point where crossing activity might occur.*

#### Standard:

- 09 **If a post-mounted W11-1, W11-11, W11-15, or W11-15a sign is placed at the location of the crossing point where golf carts, pedestrians, bicyclists, or other shared-use path users might be crossing the roadway, a diagonal downward pointing arrow (W16-7P) plaque (see Figure 2C-12) shall be mounted below the sign. If the W11-1, W11-11, W11-15, or W11-15a sign is mounted overhead, the W16-7P supplemental plaque shall not be used.**

#### Option:

- 10 The crossing location identified by a W11-1, W11-11, W11-15, or W11-15a sign may be defined with crosswalk markings (see Section 3B.18).

**Standard:**

11 **The Emergency Vehicle (W11-8) sign (see Figure 2C-10) with the EMERGENCY SIGNAL AHEAD (W11-12P) supplemental plaque (see Figure 2C-10) shall be placed in advance of all emergency-vehicle traffic control signals (see Chapter 4G).**

**Option:**

12 The Emergency Vehicle (W11-8) sign, or a word message sign indicating the type of emergency vehicle (such as rescue squad), may be used in advance of the emergency-vehicle station when no emergency-vehicle traffic control signal is present.

13 A Warning Beacon (see Section 4L.03) may be used with any Vehicular Traffic Warning sign to indicate specific periods when the condition or activity is present or is likely to be present, or to provide enhanced sign conspicuity.

14 A supplemental WHEN FLASHING (W16-13P) plaque (see Figure 2C-12) may be used with any Vehicular Traffic Warning sign that is supplemented with a Warning Beacon to indicate specific periods when the condition or activity is present or is likely to be present.

**Section 2C.50 Non-Vehicular Warning Signs (W11-2, W11-3, W11-4, W11-6, W11-7, W11-9, and W11-16 through W11-22)**

**Option:**

01 Non-Vehicular Warning (W11-2, W11-3, W11-4, W11-6, W11-7, W11-9, and W11-16 through W11-22) signs (see Figure 2C-11) may be used to alert road users in advance of locations where unexpected entries into the roadway might occur or where shared use of the roadway by pedestrians, animals, or equestrians might occur.

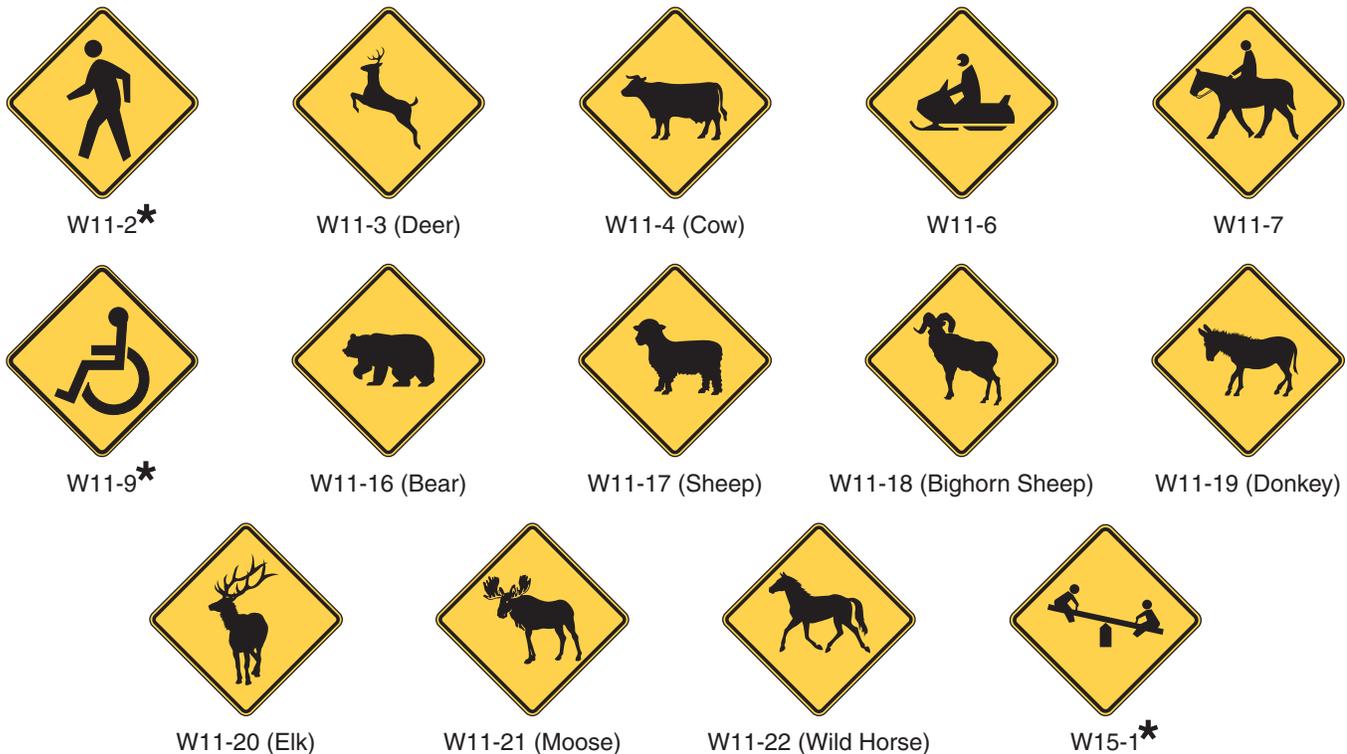
**Support:**

02 These conflicts might be relatively confined, or might occur randomly over a segment of roadway.

**Guidance:**

03 *If used in advance of a pedestrian, snowmobile, or equestrian crossing, the W11-2, W11-6, W11-7, and W11-9 signs should be supplemented with plaques (see Section 2C.55) with the legend AHEAD or XX FEET to inform road users that they are approaching a point where crossing activity might occur.*

**Figure 2C-11. Non-Vehicular Warning Signs**



\* A fluorescent yellow-green background color may be used for this sign or plaque.

**Standard:**

- 04 **If a post-mounted W11-2, W11-6, W11-7, or W11-9 sign is placed at the location of the crossing point where pedestrians, snowmobilers, or equestrians might be crossing the roadway, a diagonal downward pointing arrow (W16-7P) plaque (see Figure 2C-12) shall be mounted below the sign. If the W11-2, W11-6, W11-7, or W11-9 sign is mounted overhead, the W16-7P plaque shall not be used.**

## Option:

- 05 A Pedestrian Crossing (W11-2) sign may be placed overhead or may be post-mounted with a diagonal downward pointing arrow (W16-7P) plaque at the crosswalk location where Yield Here To (Stop Here For) Pedestrians signs (see Section 2B.11) have been installed in advance of the crosswalk.

**Standard:**

- 06 **If a W11-2 sign has been post-mounted at the crosswalk location where a Yield Here To (Stop Here For) Pedestrians sign is used on the approach, the Yield Here To (Stop Here For) Pedestrians sign shall not be placed on the same post as or block the road user's view of the W11-2 sign.**

## Option:

- 07 An advance Pedestrian Crossing (W11-2) sign with an AHEAD or a distance supplemental plaque may be used in conjunction with a Yield Here To (Stop Here For) Pedestrians sign on the approach to the same crosswalk.

- 08 The crossing location identified by a W11-2, W11-6, W11-7, or W11-9 sign may be defined with crosswalk markings (see Section 3B.18).

- 09 The W11-2 and W11-9 signs and their related supplemental plaques may have a fluorescent yellow-green background with a black legend and border.

*Guidance:*

- 10 *When a fluorescent yellow-green background is used, a systematic approach featuring one background color within a zone or area should be used. The mixing of standard yellow and fluorescent yellow-green backgrounds within a selected site area should be avoided.*

## Option:

- 11 A Warning Beacon (see Section 4L.03) may be used with any Non-Vehicular Warning sign to indicate specific periods when the condition or activity is present or is likely to be present, or to provide enhanced sign conspicuity.

- 12 A supplemental WHEN FLASHING (W16-13P) plaque (see Figure 2C-12) may be used with any Non-Vehicular Warning sign that is supplemented with a Warning Beacon to indicate specific periods when the condition or activity is present or is likely to be present.

**Section 2C.51 Playground Sign (W15-1)**

## Option:

- 01 The Playground (W15-1) sign (see Figure 2C-11) may be used to give advance warning of a designated children's playground that is located adjacent to the road.

- 02 The Playground sign may have a fluorescent yellow-green background with a black legend and border.

*Guidance:*

- 03 *If the access to the playground area requires a roadway crossing, the application of crosswalk pavement markings (see Section 3B.18) and Non-Vehicular Warning signs (see Section 2C.50) should be considered.*

**Section 2C.52 NEW TRAFFIC PATTERN AHEAD Sign (W23-2)**

## Option:

- 01 A NEW TRAFFIC PATTERN AHEAD (W23-2) sign (see Figure 2C-6) may be used on the approach to an intersection or along a section of roadway to provide advance warning of a change in traffic patterns, such as revised lane usage, roadway geometry, or signal phasing.

*Guidance:*

- 02 *The NEW TRAFFIC PATTERN AHEAD sign should be removed when the traffic pattern returns to normal, when the changed pattern is no longer considered to be new, or within six months.*

**Section 2C.53 Use of Supplemental Warning Plaques**

## Option:

- 01 A supplemental warning plaque (see Figure 2C-12) may be displayed with a warning or regulatory sign when engineering judgment indicates that road users require additional warning information beyond that contained in the main message of the warning or regulatory sign.



## Effectiveness of “Children at Play” Warning Signs

*Prepared for*  
**Bureau of Highway Operations**  
**Traffic Engineering Section, Traffic Design Unit**

*Prepared by*  
**CTC & Associates LLC**  
**WisDOT Research & Library Unit**  
**September 25, 2007**

*Transportation Synthesis Reports are brief summaries of currently available information on topics of interest to WisDOT staff throughout the department. Online and print sources for TSRs include NCHRP and other TRB programs, AASHTO, the research and practices of other transportation agencies, and related academic and industry research. Internet hyperlinks in TSRs are active at the time of publication, but changes on the host server can make them obsolete. To request a TSR, e-mail [research@dot.state.wi.us](mailto:research@dot.state.wi.us) or call (608) 261-8198.*

### **Request for Report**

WisDOT is engaged in an effort to reevaluate and update its policies regarding roadside warning signs related to children, such as “Children at Play,” “Blind Child,” “Deaf Child,” etc. We were asked to review research on the effectiveness of these types of signs to better ground WisDOT’s policy decision.

### **Summary**

There is no evidence that special warning signs of this sort reduce driver speeds or crash rates. This is the unanimous conclusion of the many credible sources we located on this topic. This claim is supplemented by a number of often-cited “common sense” observations that such signs do not give clear and enforceable guidance to drivers, provide a false sense of security to parents and children that may increase risk, expose the government to liability, give the false impression that areas without such signs do not have children, represent an unnecessary cost that then propagates as additional signs are requested and violate the principle that signage should be based on engineering, not political, decision making.

These arguments are used most frequently against Children at Play signs, and many of them—such as the arguments that CAP signs encourage playing in the street and that if in one location with children they should properly be in all locations—do not apply to Deaf Child, Blind Child, Handicapped Child or Autistic Child signs. These latter signs receive much less explicit discussion in the sources we located.

The **National Research and Guidelines** section of this TSR presents positions on child-related traffic warning signs with papers by U.S. DOT, FHWA, NCHRP and the Institute of Transportation Engineers. Though these all discourage the use of such signs, none of them cites specific research demonstrating that these signs are ineffective, and one source, the ITE *Design and Safety of Pedestrian Facilities* entry below, implies that no such studies exist, stating that “No accident-based studies have been able to determine the effectiveness of warning signs.”

**State and Local Research and Practices** contains a brief representative sampling of state and local positions on this topic. While many areas make use of these signs, we located no explicit defenses on

engineering grounds for their use. A common theme is the ongoing struggle to explain to members of the public that their requests for these types of signs are based on faulty assumptions about their effectiveness.

Many of the sources we located refer generically to multiple “studies” that have shown special warning signs to be ineffective, but despite extensive research we were unable to identify any specific projects meeting this description.

## **National Research and Guidelines**

**FHWA Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (2000)**

[http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/kno-millennium\\_06.14.01.htm](http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/kno-millennium_06.14.01.htm)

A search of the MUTCD found no instances of “CAP,” “watch for children,” “slow children,” “blind child” or “deaf.” Related guidance includes the following:

- From Section 2C.02, Application of Warning Signs (<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/HTM/2003r1/part2/part2c.htm#section2C02>): “The use of warning signs should be kept to a minimum as the unnecessary use of warning signs tends to breed disrespect for all signs.”
- From Section 2H.03, Regulatory and Warning Signs (<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/HTM/2003r1/part2/part2h.htm#section2H03>): “All regulatory and warning signs installed on public roads and streets within recreational and cultural interest areas shall conform to the requirements of Chapters 2A, 2B, and 2C” (the chapters on general, regulatory and warning signs).
- CAP or other message signs are not specifically prohibited as long as they conform to the standard shape (diamond) and colors (black letters on yellow background) and as long as no symbols are used. Some state-specific MUTCD supplements (such as in New York) present the option of a CAP or similar sign.

**Institute of Transportation Engineers: Traffic Control Devices Handbook (2001)**

*Paper copies are available from the WisDOT library.*

Page 444 states that “Agencies should avoid the use of CAUTION – CHILDREN AT PLAY or SLOW CHILDREN nonstandard signs since such signs may imply ‘that the involved jurisdiction approves of streets as playgrounds, which may result in the jurisdiction being vulnerable to tort liability.’” (This quote is reproduced and expanded in *FHWA Course on Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation: Pedestrian Signing and Pavement Markings* at [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/univcourse/swless14.htm](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/univcourse/swless14.htm).)

To determine the original research basis for these claims, we noted that this source cites ITE’s *Design and Safety of Pedestrian Facilities* (below) for the claim that using CAP signs “may result in the jurisdiction being vulnerable to tort liability,” whereas this latter source, in its comments on CAP signs, refers back to this one.

Page 444 also states that “there are conditions where selected traffic control devices may be considered, such as around parks, or conditions where children may have disabilities and drivers need to take extra care.” This implies that Blind/Deaf/Handicapped/Autistic Child signs may be appropriate in some circumstances, though no evidence is cited on the effectiveness of these devices.

**ITE: Design and Safety of Pedestrian Facilities (1998)**

[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/PED\\_BIKE/docs/designsafety.pdf](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/PED_BIKE/docs/designsafety.pdf)

Chapter 4, Pedestrian and Motorist Signing, states (page 42 of the PDF): “No accident-based studies have been able to determine the effectiveness of warning signs. However, this is understandable because of the complex nature of events leading into each accident.” Of the 41 agencies responding to a questionnaire used in preparing this report, four reported that “all types of pedestrian-related signs and pavement stencils were helpful,” while some agencies “responded that they use these devices in the hope that they will provide some benefit to pedestrians.” (See page 39 of the PDF.) Also on page 39: “Signs should only be installed when they fulfill a need based on an engineering study or engineering judgment. In general, signs are often ineffective in modifying driver behavior, and overuse of signs breeds disrespect and diminishes effectiveness. Unnecessary signs and posts represent a hazard to errant motorists and may cause an

obstruction to pedestrians and bicyclists. Furthermore, unnecessary signs are a waste of taxpayer dollars, represent an ongoing maintenance cost, and are a source of visual blight.”

#### **NCHRP Synthesis of Highway Practice No. 139: Pedestrians and Traffic-Control Measures (1988)**

*Paper copies are available from the WisDOT library.*

This report, quoting an earlier version of the *Traffic Control Devices Handbook* than the one listed above, says “Nonuniform signs such as ‘CAUTION—CHILDREN AT PLAY,’ ‘SLOW—CHILDREN,’ or similar legends should not be permitted on any roadway at any time... the removal of any nonstandard signs should carry a high priority.”

#### **NCHRP Synthesis of Highway Practice No. 186: Supplemental Advance Warning Devices (1993)**

*Paper copies are available from the WisDOT library.*

This report gives examples of numerous related signs currently in use. A specific example of a CAP sign is given on pages 38-39: “The device is not considered effective, but installation of the sign satisfied parent and political leaders. Generally, the residents and homeowners’ organization must pay to have this sign installed. The use of this sign and its variations has been discouraged by many agencies because the message implies that it is acceptable for children to be playing in the street. It is nonstandard due to the use of a symbol not contained in the MUTCD.”

#### **U.S. DOT Message Points (February 11, 2002)**

*Paper copies are available from the FHWA. Please send a request to Fred Ranck, [fred.ranck@fhwa.dot.gov](mailto:fred.ranck@fhwa.dot.gov).*

This communication states U.S. DOT’s position on CAP signs, which is to conform to MUTCD standards. Highlights include:

- Studies of the effectiveness of CAP signs by ITE, TRB and FHWA to date do not demonstrate a reduction in crashes involving children nor a reduction in speeds. (Note: ITE and FHWA staff were unaware of any studies.)
- From an ITE “traffic tips” series that answers residents’ commonly asked questions about signs, etc.: “...studies made in cities where (CAP) signs were widely posted in residential areas showed no evidence of having reduced pedestrian crashes or vehicle speed.” Several cities report that measured speeds on residential streets experienced no decrease after the installation of CAP warning signs. Further, several cities reported no decrease in the incidence of traffic crashes involving a child hit in the street after the installation of CAP warning signs.

Fred Ranck of FHWA also states that “Children at Play” is not an appropriate message for a warning sign; rather “Watch for Children” is an appropriate message consistent with other warning sign messages.

### **State and Local Research and Practices**

We have included some comments on CAP and other signs by state governments; state DOT research programs, including tech transfer efforts; and communities. Most sources agreed with the information from national sources. We have presented such exceptions as we were able to locate. We did not find any references to research supporting the use of these signs or other cogent arguments against the national stance regarding these signs.

#### **Multiple States**

More or less identical arguments repeating the national points made above appear in a number of state DOT tech transfer documents, including Massachusetts

([http://www.ecs.umass.edu/baystate\\_roads/newsletters/2001\\_fall.pdf](http://www.ecs.umass.edu/baystate_roads/newsletters/2001_fall.pdf)),

New Hampshire (<http://www.t2.unh.edu/spring02/pg4.html>), California

([www.techtransfer.berkeley.edu/newsletter/05-1/signs.php](http://www.techtransfer.berkeley.edu/newsletter/05-1/signs.php)) and Minnesota

(<http://www.mnltap.umn.edu/publications/exchange/2001-1/atplay.html>).

This source states that “most collisions involving children are not actually caused by driver behavior (which this sign has very little demonstrated effect on), but by unsafe, erratic actions by children... The CHILDREN AT PLAY sign may well be understood by kids and families as a suggestion that it is acceptable for children to play in the street, and thus, by producing a false sense of security, be

counterproductive. Furthermore, CHILDREN AT PLAY signs tend to propagate through neighborhoods, popping up on every block that has a child living on it. Signs lose credibility with motorists when they appear too often. Instead of being extra diligent, drivers tend to ignore the signs, particularly if no children are playing near the CHILDREN AT PLAY signs. When these signs appear too often, they raise questions like: If there is no sign does that mean there are no children present and no need to watch for children?"

### Alaska

#### **Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska, Traffic Department FAQ**

<http://www.muni.org/traffic/FAQ.cfm>

This FAQ asks: "Are there any guidelines for the installation of Children at Play signs?" Alaska DOT answers: "Yes. Children at Play signs are typically posted on neighborhood streets directly located off higher speed roadways." This approach may bypass many of the national arguments against the use of these signs.

### Colorado/Wyoming

#### **2006 Section Activities Report: Colorado/Wyoming Section of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (2007)**

<http://www.ite.org/elected/Colorado-Wyoming%20Section.pdf>

This report states that "nonuniform signs such as 'Caution—Children at Play,' 'Slow—Children' or similar legends should not be permitted on any roadway at any time," presenting the national reasons and citing the FHWA 1983 *Traffic Control Devices Handbook*. According to the *ITE Journal*, May 1988, "Children at Play signs may make parents feel more secure but they don't work and they carry no enforcement value."

#### **Colorado LTAP Newsletter, Spring 2004**

[http://ltap.colorado.edu/newsletter/Newsletter\\_Spring04.pdf](http://ltap.colorado.edu/newsletter/Newsletter_Spring04.pdf)

On page 3, this newsletter addresses the Web site question, "What does MUTCD say about 'Children at Play' signs?" It repeats the national arguments and gives the additional argument, drawing from the TRB report *Maintenance Management of Street and Highways Signs* that deviating from the MUTCD (which does not include Children at Play and similar warning signs) is a bad idea because "about 29 percent of tort liability lawsuits against highway departments are related to traffic signing."

### Florida

#### **Florida Technology Transfer Traffic Information Program Series (TIPS), from the Florida Section (District 10) of the Institute of Transportation Engineers**

<http://mctrans.ce.ufl.edu/transportationTopics/tips.htm>

Two TIPS are relevant to this TSR:

- **"Won't a Children at Play sign help protect our kids?"**  
(<http://mctrans.ce.ufl.edu/transportationTopics/tips.htm#4>) This tip states that "studies made in cities where such signs were widely posted in residential areas show no evidence of having reduced pedestrian crashes, vehicle speed or legal liability. In fact, many types of signs which were installed to warn of normal conditions in residential areas failed to achieve the desired safety benefits. Further, if signs encourage parents with children to believe they have an added degree of protection—which the signs do not and cannot provide—a great disservice results... . Specific warnings for schools, playgrounds, parks and other recreational facilities are available for use where clearly justified."
- **"Why are traffic engineers reluctant to install Deaf Child or Blind Child warning signs?"**  
(<http://mctrans.ce.ufl.edu/transportationTopics/tips.htm#74>) This tip gives the following reasons against using nonstandard, highly specific signs of this sort:
  - A Deaf Child or Blind Child sign does not describe where the child might be. Most streets within a residential area have children who react in the same way, and each driver must be aware of all children in a neighborhood environment.
  - These signs provide parents and children with a false sense of security that their children are safe when playing in or near the street.
  - When the novelty of such a sign wears off, the signs no longer attract the attention of regular passersby.

- Unique or unusual warning signs are a target for vandals and souvenir hunters and have a high replacement cost.
- Unique message signs have no legal meaning or established precedent for use in basic traffic engineering references. Their use is discouraged because of both the lack of proven effectiveness and undesirable liability exposure.
- Many traffic engineers feel that special warning signs are warranted at a location adjacent to a school for the deaf or for the blind, and have considerably more merit than those at a location where a deaf or blind person may only cross occasionally.

## Maine

### **3.6.3 “Special” Warning Signs: “Children At Play,” “Deaf Person,” “Disabled Person,” “Horse Crossing,” etc.**

<http://www.maine.gov/mdot/working-with-dot/section3.php>

This regulation states that “...the driving public does not react favorably or positively to these signs in most cases. In the late 1990s, the MaineDOT changed its policy on the installation and maintenance of these signs. It is virtually impossible for the MaineDOT to keep track of every handicapped person, playing child and crossing horse in every town along all state roads.... Knowing that these signs are generally ineffective, MaineDOT does NOT advise the use of these signs because allowing one sets precedence and generates many more requests and creates a new financial burden on the municipality.”

## Michigan

### **Speed Control in Residential Areas**

<http://www.ite.org/traffic/documents/tcir0053.pdf>

Page 24 of the PDF states: “Special warning signs such as ‘Children at Play,’ ‘Watch for Children’ or others that warn of normal conditions are not effective in reducing speeds in residential areas,” among other of the standard national arguments against these signs. It continues: “The MMUTCD provides standards for signs warning drivers that they are approaching recreational facilities such as parks and playgrounds. However, there is not enough evidence to determine the effect of these warning signs on vehicle speeds.” (Reference: Michigan Department of Transportation and the Michigan State Police, *Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, 1994 edition.)

### **City of Troy, Mich.: “How about a ‘Children at Play’ sign?”**

<http://www.troymi.gov/TrafficEngineering/Children%20at%20play.html>

According to this document, “Studies made in cities around the nation where such signs were widely posted in residential areas show no evidence of having reduced pedestrian crashes, vehicle speed or legal liability.” According to research in the City of Troy: “Studies in the City of Troy have also shown very low effectiveness of the sign and therefore have not installed them in the past several years. Before and after studies showed no reduction in speeds.”

## Minnesota

### **Frequently Asked Questions, Office of Traffic, Safety and Operations**

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng/faq/faq-signing.html#m>

Question: “I would like to have a ‘deaf child/blind child/slow children at play’ sign installed on my street/highway near my home. How do I get this accomplished?”

Answer: “Mn/DOT does not install this type of sign on state highways since it is not enforceable (it is a warning sign) and it can lead to a false sense of security. If you are requesting signing on a city street, contact the city offices.”

## North Carolina

### **Traffic Engineering Policies, Practices and Legal Authority Resources**

NCDOT will install these signs upon receipt of a formal written request meeting certain criteria:

- Blind Child Area Signing: [http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/B-10/B-10\\_p.pdf](http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/B-10/B-10_p.pdf)
- Autistic Child Area Signing: [http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/A-18/A-18\\_p.pdf](http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/A-18/A-18_p.pdf)

- Deaf Child Area Signing: [http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/D-02/D-02\\_p.pdf](http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/D-02/D-02_p.pdf)

This strategy seems typical of a number of states. According to [http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/C-05/C-05\\_mm.pdf](http://www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/traffic/tepl/Topics/C-05/C-05_mm.pdf), “Children Playing warning signs are not approved for use on the state highway system right of way. These signs tend to promote a false sense of security for the children and encourage them to actually play in the roadway, since traffic is warned of their presence.”

### **Ohio**

#### **Slow Children at Play Signs**

[http://dot.state.oh.us/dist1/planning/TrafficStudies/children\\_at\\_play\\_signs.htm](http://dot.state.oh.us/dist1/planning/TrafficStudies/children_at_play_signs.htm)

According to this policy, “These signs are not used by Ohio Department of Transportation on the rural state highway system and ODOT discourages others from using them.”

This text is repeated in the *Office of Traffic Engineering Traffic Engineering Manual*, page 19 of the PDF: [http://dot.state.oh.us/traffic/Publication%20Manuals/TEM/Part\\_02/part\\_02\\_complete%20for%20072007.pdf](http://dot.state.oh.us/traffic/Publication%20Manuals/TEM/Part_02/part_02_complete%20for%20072007.pdf)

### **Virginia**

*A Look at What Some States are Doing. “Deaf Child Area” Signs Available in Virginia* (1988)

From AASHTO QUARTERLY, Vol. 67, No. 4, p. 13.

*Paper copies are available through the transportation library system.*

VDOT officials have developed a policy that allows the use of Deaf Child Area warning signs. Parents of hearing-impaired children can request these signs through the VDOT residency for the area where the sign is desired. The request must be supported by medical certification of the child’s hearing loss. The signs will be allowed on nonlimited access roadways of the primary or secondary system. Jurisdictions maintaining their own streets and highways are encouraged to use similar guidelines for the use of these signs.

### **West Virginia**

**Traffic Engineering Directive 225: “Children at Play” Signing** (1999)

<http://www.wvdot.com/engineering/Manuals/Traffic/TED/TED225.pdf>

This directive states that “since the other signing alternatives convey to motorists specific regulations or warning or more permanent roadway conditions rather than conditions that may exist at unspecified times, Children Present signs should only be installed after all the other alternatives have been considered.”