

Standards and Guidelines - MUTCD

Traffic and Safety Manual
Chapter 2

Signing

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[The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices](#) (MUTCD) contains the basic principles, guidance and standards that control the use of traffic signs for all streets and highways open to the public. The MUTCD provides standards and guidance on the design, placement, maintenance and uniformity of traffic signs. The Iowa DOT currently uses the 2009 MUTCD except for exceptions noted in the [Administrative Rule Chapter 761, Section 130.1 \(1\)](#).

Signs should be designed to command attention, provide a clear message, permit adequate time to respond and command respect. The combination of sign size, shape, color, contrast, composition, simplicity of the message, legibility, and uniformity must be used to achieve this goal.

Many traffic signs are a standard shape, size and color and shown in the ["Standard Highway Signs"](#) book. All symbols and colors for signs not shown in the "Standard Highway Signs" book shall follow the procedures for experimentation and change. Word message signs to notify road users of special regulations or to warn road users of a situation that may not be readily apparent may be developed without the need for experimentation.

Uniformity of traffic signs serves many purposes and is important. Uniformity aids in recognition and understanding, reducing perception and reaction times. Uniformity assists the motorists, police officers, and traffic courts by providing a common interpretation to everyone. Uniformity means treating similar situations in a similar manner. The use of uniform traffic signs does not by itself lead to uniformity. The use of a standard traffic sign where it is not appropriate is as much of a problem as the use of a nonstandard sign. This may even be worse as the use of signs where they are not needed may lead to disrespect for those locations where the sign is needed and appropriate.

[Part 1A](#) and [Part 2A](#) of the MUTCD provide the general standards and guidance for traffic control devices and traffic signs. Part 2 of the MUTCD also shows many typical standard signs approved for use on the highway.

Additional signing guidelines and details specific to the Iowa Department of Transportation may be found in the [SI-Series Standard Road Plans](#).