

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #13

WHY CAN'T WE HAVE STOP SIGNS TO REDUCE SPEEDING ALONG MY STREET?

One of the complaints that people have in residential areas is that vehicles constantly speed by the front of their house. They are concerned about the safety of their children. These residents frequently request the erection of additional stop signs. The addition of a stop sign, however, usually does not solve the problem.

WHY DON'T WE JUST INSTALL ANOTHER STOP SIGN?

A stop sign is an inconvenience to motorists. Because of this, stop signs should only be placed if they meet a *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) warrant. Stop signs are frequently violated if unwarranted. Before warrants are even considered, however, less restrictive measures (such as a yield sign) are usually considered. In certain cases, the use of less restrictive measure or no control at all will accommodate traffic demands safely and effectively.

WARRANTS FOR A STOP SIGN

Because a stop sign is an inconvenience to through traffic, it should be used only where needed. A stop sign may be warranted at an intersection where one or more of the following conditions exist:

- intersection of a less important road with a main road where application of the regular right-of-way rule is hazardous;
- street entering a through highway or street;
- unsignalized intersection in a signalized area;
- other intersections where a combination of high speed, restricted view, and serious accident record indicates a need for control by the stop sign.

A yield sign can also be considered where a full stop is not necessary. Existing sign installations should be reviewed to determine whether the use of a less restrictive control or no control at all could accommodate the existing and projected traffic flow safely and more effectively.

WHERE SHOULD A STOP SIGN BE INSTALLED?

Stop signs should be installed/located where the vehicles are to stop or as near to that point as possible. The sign may also be supplemented with a stop line and/or the word STOP on the pavement. A yield sign is erected in the same manner. Where there is a marked crosswalk, the stop or yield sign should be erected approximately four feet in advance of the crosswalk line.

When only one stop or yield sign is used on an intersection approach it should be on the right side of the roadway. At wide intersections, however, violations of the yield or stop sign may be reduced by the erection of an additional sign on the left side of the approach. If two lanes of traffic exist on an approach, at least one stop sign should be visible to each lane of traffic.

CAN STOP SIGNS CONTROL SPEED?

Many studies have shown that stop signs are not an effective measure for controlling or reducing midblock speeds. In fact, the overuse of stop signs may cause drivers to carelessly stop at the stop signs that are installed. In stop sign observance studies approximately half of all motorists came to a rolling stop and 25 percent did not stop at all. Stop signs can give pedestrians a false sense of safety if it is assumed that all vehicles will come to a complete stop at the proper location. A study conducted by Beaubien also showed that placing stop signs along a street may actually increase the peak speed of vehicles, because motorists tend to increase their speed between stop signs to regain the time spent at the stop signs.

WHAT CAN WE DO INSTEAD OF INSTALLING A NEW STOP SIGN?

There are many alternatives to stop signs. For example, a concept called *traffic calming*, the combination of physical controls and community support, might be a good alternative for some communities. Calming measures can be installed as part of an areawide traffic management plan or on a single street and involve local law enforcement, emergency and maintenance officials, engineers, and the community.

Some communities also start interneighborhood programs to address the problem of the speeding and safety in their neighborhood areas. Often times, the true problem stems mostly from drivers that live in the neighborhood. By simply raising awareness of the issue, drivers in the neighborhood may adjust their driving and decrease their speeds.

Unfortunately, there is no general solution to the problem of speeding traffic. There will always be drivers that speed through residential areas. It is important for residents in a neighborhood to be aware of this issue.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.

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Can we have stop signs placed at intersections in our neighborhood to reduce speeding?

We get many complaints from people in residential areas about cars speeding in their neighborhoods. They often ask us to install more stop signs. This concern is very understandable. Unfortunately, adding stop signs may not be the best solution. In fact, you may be surprised to learn, adding stop signs can sometimes make the problem worse. Here is why:

Stop signs don't always slow traffic

Strange as it may seem, installing stop signs may not result in reduced traffic speeds. Studies have shown that stop signs are not effective at controlling drivers' speeds between intersections. In fact, motorists sometimes drive even faster between stop signs to make up for time "lost" while stopped—actually increasing peak speeds and potentially making neighborhoods more dangerous.

Installing stop signs can do more harm than good

Too many stop signs may also actually discourage good driving habits. Studies have shown that if stop signs are overused or are located where they don't seem to be necessary, some drivers become careless about stopping at them. This can be especially dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists who may have a false sense of safety from the existence of a stop sign.

Other solutions

Fortunately, there are other ways to encourage traffic to slow down. Sometimes even a simple neighborhood awareness program can be effective.

For more information

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