

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #14

Why Can't a Multiway Stop Sign Be Placed to Reduce Accidents at an Intersection?

It may seem like installing a multiway stop sign at a particular intersection would slow drivers down and make the streets safer, but additional stop signs do not necessarily increase safety. In fact, the overuse of stop signs can sometimes lead drivers to ignore them, especially when the signs are installed at locations where they are not really needed. Therefore, traffic engineers make careful decisions concerning the use of multiway stop signs. Some of the factors they consider are described below.

Too many stop signs can lead to ineffectiveness

Studies have shown that when stop signs are placed at intersections where they are not really needed, some motorists become careless about obeying them. Moreover, the overuse of multiway stop signs can contribute to the number of frustrated, impatient, and, consequently, reckless drivers on the streets.

Multiway stop signs are installed only where they are needed

To make travel as efficient and safe as possible, multiway stop signs are usually installed only where conditions warrant their use. Multiway stop signs are often installed at the intersection of two roadways that contain similar traffic volumes, and that intersection must meet at least one of the following conditions:

- A traffic signal is going to be installed and the intersection needs a temporary solution to control traffic.
- At least five crashes have occurred at the intersection within a 12-month period that could have been prevented by stop signs.
- The intersection sees relatively high volumes of vehicle and possibly pedestrian and/or bicycle traffic.

Other alternatives may provide just as much safety

Before a multiway stop sign is installed, other, less restrictive solutions should be considered, such as the following:

- Relocate the stop line(s) to improve visibility at the intersection.
- Limit the number of driveways in close proximity to the intersection; unexpected movements to/from these driveways sometimes cause drivers to suddenly stop or swerve, resulting in crashes.
- Install flashing beacons before or at the intersection to provide advance warning to drivers or to supplement existing stop signs, respectively.
- Install roadway lighting to reduce the frequency of crashes at night.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.