

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #1

Won't a "Children at Play" Sign Help Protect Our Children?

We often get requests from parents for "Children at Play" signs to be installed in their neighborhoods. Parents hope that the signs will encourage drivers to slow down and drive cautiously. The concern for the safety of children is very important and is shared by highway and street officials. Unfortunately, "Children at Play" signs may not be the best solution. Here's why:

Placing signs does not slow vehicles

The speeds people choose to drive along a roadway are generally determined by the roadway's characteristics and environment and by the level of comfort and safety the driver perceives. In many cases, "Children at Play" or "Playground" (i.e., a sign with children on a teeter-totter) signs are placed along local neighborhood roadways; the users of these roadways are local residents and typically are aware of children in the neighborhood. The characteristics and environments of many local residential roadways also usually produce relatively low speeds. In this type of environment, a reduction in general vehicle speeds through the placement of a "Children at Play" or "Playground" sign should not be expected, especially when the hazard is not consistently clear to the driver.

Signs are used to warn of consistent, not occasional, conditions

A 2012 study of "Playground" warning signs conducted at three sites in Minnesota found that the signs produced no effect on mean vehicle speeds at one site and decreased mean vehicle speeds by 0.9 and 1.5 mph at the other two sites. The magnitudes of these vehicle speed differences, although statistically significant, are not considered significant in any practical sense. The researchers concluded that if this type of sign, which is installed next to playgrounds or similar areas, did not reduce vehicle speeds at any practical level, then warning signs with a more general message (e.g., "Children at Play") would be likely to have a similar or even less noticeable impact.

With or without signs, education and awareness can be important

Even when "Children at Play" signs are used, it may not be a good idea to let your guard down or be lulled into a false sense of safety. Children can benefit from keeping in mind that the street is not a place to play and that drivers may not necessarily be watching out for them.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.