

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #20

When Are Stop Signs and Traffic Signals Appropriate for Intersections?

Installing traffic control devices such as stop signs or traffic signals does not necessarily slow drivers down or increase safety at intersections. In fact, the overuse of traffic control devices can sometimes lead drivers to disobey or ignore them, especially when they are installed where they are not needed.

Therefore, local transportation officials make careful decisions concerning the use of stop signs and traffic signals. 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, motorists may 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.

The use of signs and signals should be restricted to locations where they will be effective

To make travel efficient and safe and to help ensure the proper observance of stop signs and traffic signals, traffic control devices are installed only where they (1) fulfill a need, (2) convey a clear, simple meaning, (3) command attention and respect, and (4) give adequate time for drivers to respond.

A location must meet one or more of the following the conditions for a stop sign to be warranted:

1. A less important road intersects a main road and application of the normal right-of-way rule would not be expected to provide reasonable compliance with the law.
2. A street is entering a through highway or street.
3. The intersection is in a signalized area but is itself unsignalized.
4. A combination of high entering traffic volumes, a restricted view, or a problematic crash history indicates the need for control by a stop sign.

Multiway stop signs are often used at the intersection of two roadways that contain similar traffic volumes. The location must meet at least one of the following conditions:

- Traffic signals are justified, and a multiway stop sign is an interim measure that can be installed quickly to control traffic while arrangements are made for the signal installation.
- Five or more crashes have occurred over a 12-month period that are correctable by a multiway stop sign. Such accidents include right- and left-turn collisions as well as right-angle collisions.
- The intersection meets one of three minimum traffic volume criteria listed in Section 2B.07 of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

At least one of nine conditions must be met for a traffic signal to be installed. These conditions include high vehicle and/or pedestrian volumes, a record of severe but correctable crashes, and school crossings where the gaps in the traffic flow are insufficient for schoolchildren to cross safely.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.