



## WHY “CHILDREN AT PLAY” SIGNS SHOULD NOT BE INSTALLED

Traffic signs are a critical part of our transportation network. The Federal Highway Administration’s Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is the leading document which specifies regulations on signs, pavement markings and traffic signals. With regard to sign installations, the MUTCD states that all sign installations must do the following:

- Fulfill a need.
- Command attention.
- Convey a clear, simple meaning.
- Command respect from road users.
- Give adequate time for proper response.



Signs in the manual are separated into several categories. Those signs that are most often seen on local roads are regulatory, warning, guide and temporary. *Regulatory* signs such as stop, lane control and speed limit signs define the rules of the road. *Warning* signs call attention to unexpected conditions on or adjacent to a highway, street or private road. *Guide* signs such as street name and directional signs provide help drivers to find a desired destination. Drivers rely on proper signage to inform them of the traffic laws, unforeseen road conditions and destination guidance.

Proper signage also helps make communities more livable and streets safer. Residents, including children, often use the streets in their community to walk and bike. Often, municipal officials receive requests for road signs which residents believe will make their community safer. These requests are often for the installation of “CHILDREN AT PLAY,” “SLOW CHILDREN AT PLAY” or “SLOW CHILDREN” signs. Residents might argue that children play in or near the road and there has to be some warning given to drivers. Some residents feel that their children will be at risk without these signs. When only these arguments are considered, it might seem logical that “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs should be installed. However, there are other considerations.

The MUTCD is incorporated by 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 655, Subpart F and shall be recognized as the national standard for all traffic control devices that are installed on any street, highway, bikeway, or private road open to public travel. The State of Connecticut has also adopted the MUTCD as law.

The intent of the manual is to provide national consistency for the installation of traffic control devices, and this consistency eliminates driver confusion and helps make roads safer. It is the source for when and where a sign should be installed and which sign it should be. The MUTCD does not include “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs or any variation. But why is this?



**There are several reasons that “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs are not recommended.**

Here are just a few:

- They are typically designed to look like warning signs, with a black legend on a yellow background. Other warning signs provide information on specific locations of the hazard (intersection, pedestrian crossing, curve, etc.).

“CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs merely inform a driver that children may be in or near the road.

- If you install “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs in one neighborhood and do not install them in others, a driver may be led to believe that there are no children in the areas without the signs, making children or other residents more vulnerable.
- “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs could give a false sense of security in letting children play in the roads. In fact, no level of signage could ever protect a pedestrian when they are struck by a vehicle.
- Studies have shown that “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs do not reduce the speed of traffic or make drivers more observant.
- When you install signs not in conformance with the MUTCD, you could be creating liability for your agency.



## Some things to consider when a resident requests a “CHILDREN AT PLAY” sign:

- Does the street have sidewalks, or does the volume of pedestrian traffic make sidewalks a consideration?
- Does the street have well-graded clear shoulders or grass strips where pedestrians can walk or wait and adequately be seen by a driver?
- Does the roadway have a speed limit sign in the area? Some streets do not have speed limit signs and other streets go a long distance without any. A speed limit is a clear message to a driver regarding their speed of travel. A good rule of thumb is to have a speed limit sign every minute of travel.
- If there is an area where pedestrians are regularly using the road a “PEDESTRIAN” warning sign may be used along with a “SHARE THE ROAD” sub-plaque (MUTCD sign designation W11-2 and W16-1).

**Most importantly, parents and guardians should instruct children on the dangers of playing near or in the street and strongly discourage them from doing so.**

### References:

<https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009r1r2/mutcd2009r1part1.pdf>

<https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009r1r2/part2c.pdf>

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