

MUTCD Compliance Guide

Traffic signs visually communicate information to drivers to help them stay safe and informed while driving. To ensure that traffic signs are effective and visible at all times, the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) defines and regulates the size, color, shapes, wording, and placement of these signs. The goal of MUTCD is to create a common national communication system that keeps roadways and drivers safe.



Who's required to comply?

Any traffic control device installed on a street, highway, or bicycle trail open to public travel must comply with MUTCD. This includes parking lots, roads within shopping centers, toll roads, sports arenas, airports, and other business or recreation facilities that are privately owned but where the public is allowed to travel without access restrictions. Private roads are not required to comply with MUTCD regulations.

Here's what MUTCD says

According to MUTCD Section 2A.06, "The basic requirements of a sign are that it be legible to those for whom it is intended and that it be understandable in time to permit a proper response. Desirable attributes include: A. High visibility by day and night; and B. High legibility (adequately sized letters, symbols, or arrows, and a short legend for quick comprehension by a road user approaching a sign). Standardized colors and shapes are specified so that the several classes of traffic signs can be promptly recognized. Simplicity and uniformity in design, position, and application are important."

Key MUTCD Compliance Areas Explained

Sign Retroreflectivity

MUTCD provides specific guidelines for maintaining optimal sign visibility at night via either **illumination** or **retroreflection**. Compliance cannot be achieved through street or highway lighting. See tables below for further explanation.

Table 2A-1. Illumination of Sign Elements

Means of Illumination	Sign Element to be Illuminated
Light behind the sign face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbol or word message • Background • Symbol, word message, and background (through a translucent material)
Attached or independently mounted light source designed to direct essentially uniform illumination onto the sign face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entire sign face
Light emitting diodes (LEDs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbol or word message • Portions of the sign border
Other devices, or treatments that highlight the sign shape, color, or message include: Luminous tubing, Fiber optics, Incandescent light bulbs or Luminescent panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbol or word message • Entire sign face

Source: MUTCD 2009 Edition

Table 2A-2. Retroreflection of Sign Elements

Means of Retroreflection	Sign Element
Reflector “buttons” or similar units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbol • Word message • Border
A material that has a smooth, sealed outer surface over a microstructure that reflects light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbol • Word message • Border • Background

Source: MUTCD 2009 Edition

Sign Size

MUTCD also provides guidelines regarding what size traffic sign must be used depending on the location (e.g. conventional roads, expressways, and freeways). Requirements for three of the most common regulatory signs are described below.



Stop Sign

Conventional Road	
Single Lane	30" x 30"
Multi-Lane	36" x 36"
Expressway	36" x 36"
Freeway	-
Minimum	30" x 30"
Oversized	48" x 48"



Yield Sign

Conventional Road	
Single Lane	36" x 36" x 36"
Multi-Lane	48" x 48" x 48"
Expressway	48" x 48" x 48"
Freeway	60" x 60" x 60"
Minimum	30" x 30" x 30"
Oversized	-



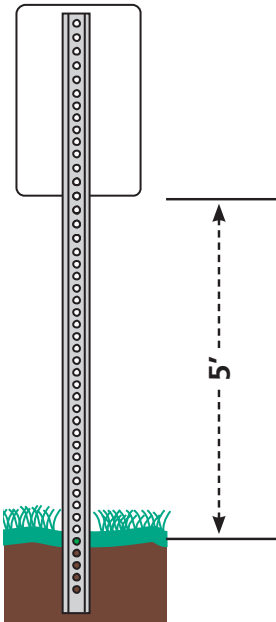
Speed Limit Sign

Conventional Road	
Single Lane	24" x 30"
Multi-Lane	30" x 36"
Expressway	36" x 48"
Freeway	48" x 60"
Minimum	18" x 24"
Oversized	30" x 36"

For more, view the latest edition of MUTCD [here](#).

Sign Mounting Height

MUTCD mandates that sign posts, foundations, and mountings must be constructed so as to keep signs in a “proper and permanent position, and to resist swaying in the wind or displacement by vandalism.”



In **rural areas**, signs shall be installed a **minimum of 5 feet** measured vertically from the bottom of the sign to the elevation of the near edge of the pavement.



In **urban areas**, signs shall be installed a **minimum of 7 feet** (measured vertically from the bottom of a sign to the top of a curb or elevation of the near edge of the traveled way in the absence of a curb) in business, commercial, or residential areas at the side of the road where a pedestrian may traverse.

Comply with Emedco



Emedco’s High-Intensity Reflective traffic signs are MUTCD-compliant - get yours today at emedco.com.

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