

Safety signs in the workplace should be used to provide clear direction and to effectively communicate known hazards.

Two standards play a major part in assisting organisations utilise appropriate signage: the Australian Standard 1319 "Safety signs for the occupational Environment" (recognised by all workplace authorities as the basis for signage in the workplace) and the Australian Standard 1742.3 "Australian Standard Manual of uniform traffic control devices, part 3: Traffic control devices for works on roads".

When talking to clients two commonly heard statements are: "Our signage meets AS1319 because it was supplied by a recognised sign manufacturer"; and "All our traffic management practices meet AS 1742.3". In practice, these statements are often found to be deficient.

Here are some of the common workplace safety signage mistakes.

(1) Confusing what the AS1319 standard covers.

Too often organisations incorrectly believe buying a sign designed and manufactured to AS1319 makes the use of the sign compliant with the standard. Sign design and manufacture are only one part of the standard; correct sign selection, siting and management play a major (and often forgotten) part.

(2) The "maybe it applies, maybe it doesn't" theory

A regulatory sign must require a *mandatory* action or *prohibit* an action in accordance with established laws, rules or directions, rather than merely warn against taking certain action. Many organisations (particularly those managing high risk construction sites) often place an array of mandatory and hazard signs at their boundaries or entrances, trying to predict an array of possible workplace scenarios. Rarely do you observe worksite enforcing the constant wearing of high visibility vests and protective foot, head, ear and eye wear (as seen in "Multiple PPE sign"). When questioned site managers often incorrectly indicate the mandatory sign means "those items may need to be worn, when required, during certain activities". Such statements contradict the mandatory message.



Multiple PPE sign

(3) Failure to promptly remove obsolete signs

Too often organisations fail to immediately remove all signs immediately the information they contain is no longer relevant.

Speed restriction signs are often incorrectly displayed when no workers are on site or there are no relevant road condition safety reasons. The site manager (the person or body responsible for carrying out the works) must ensure worksite speed zones are removed or covered immediately the need no longer exists.

Symbolic Worker Signs are falsely displayed when no workers are on site. These signs are required to be covered or removed when workers are not in the worksite.

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(4) Poor siting of signs

Poor sign siting can reduce the effectiveness of the message being communicated.



Symbolic Worker Sign

Speed restriction signs are often deployed too far in advance or too far past the worksite relative to the traffic speed. AS1742.3 specifies the distances that signage should be deployed both in advance and after the worksite.

Regulatory signs are not consistently placed at an appropriate height (AS1319 specifies signage should be as close as practicable to the observer's line of sight in the vertical plane), in a location visible to the observer as they approach a hazard and at an appropriate distance to the hazard.

(5) Missing signage

Missing signage is most prevalence in roadside workplaces; no "End Speed Restriction" signs deployed after the worksite or restrictions maintained for long distances between actual work areas. The legal requirement for roadwork speed zones to be terminated (traffic returned to its original or prevailing speed limit) either by another regulatory speed control sign (or end restriction sign), or other means as specified in Road Rules is often forgotten. The "END ROADWORK" sign does not legally allow drivers to return to their original speed.



Pedestrian Prohibition Signs

Organisations managing roadside worksites often forget to utilise prohibition signage, limiting pedestrian access to the worksite. The use of prohibition signage controls is often found missing from the construction Job Safety and Environmental Analysis (JSEA).

(6) Confusing sign selection

Poor sign selection can create an extremely confusing scenario. The picture on the right shows a roadside worksite with a mandatory requirement for head protection while pedestrians are allowed through the same area (if they "watch their step"). Poor signage selection may not only result in poor communication but can also increase an organisations liability.



A confused message

The "TRAFFIC HAZARD AHEAD" sign is too often inappropriately selected for use at roadside worksites. This sign is for emergency use only (if unexpected event causes a traffic hazard). Should the hazard remain for any appreciable time, the sign should be replaced as soon as possible, generally within 24 hours, by a sign more appropriate to the conditions present (eg WATER OVER ROAD).



Emergency Hazard Sign