

New sign retroreflectivity rules require management plans

After years of work—starting as long ago as 1992—the FHWA recently released MUTCD Section 2A.09, which establishes new minimum levels of retroreflectivity for signs. The new standard also outlines compliance deadlines for the new regulations, and requirements for sign assessment and management plans.

Compliance deadlines

The new rule specifies three-stage compliance deadlines. Assuming agencies get started now, the deadlines are generous.

First, agencies must have a sign assessment or management plan in place by 2012. The plan must cover improved sign inspection, data management, and sign replacement within a typical sign replacement cycle. Second, all regulatory, warning, and ground-mounted signs must comply with the retroreflectivity standards by 2015. Finally, overhead guide signs and street name signs must comply by January 2018.

Sign assessment or management plans

Tom McDonald, CTRE's safety circuit rider, emphasizes the importance of starting now to put together a sign management plan. Four years might seem like plenty of time, but a major part of developing the plan is compiling a required comprehensive set of data about all signs in your jurisdiction.

That will take time.

Some people who have already started working on their plans have been surprised to find out just how many signs are in their jurisdictions and how little data they actually have on all those signs compared with what they'll need to be in compliance.

And it will take money.

Assessing all signs in your jurisdiction will be the most expensive part of developing your plan. Many personnel hours and certain equipment will be needed to identify, classify, locate (using GIS techniques for accuracy), and measure every sign and

record the data.

This may be the time to seriously consider using sign management software if you're not using it already. This software can help you gather, record, and analyze information about your signs that you'll need to meet the second and third compliance deadlines.

Using software doesn't guarantee compliance, but it may help you set sign replacement schedules without having to undertake expensive and time-consuming visual inspections.

Like many projects, the least expensive elements of the sign management process are the hardware and software required to do the job right.

Exceptions

The following roadway signs may be excluded from the requirements for minimum retroreflectivity:

- A. Parking, Standing, and Stopping signs (R7 and R8 series)
- B. Walking/Hitchhiking/Crossing signs (R9 series, R10-1 through R10-4b)
- C. Adopt-A-Highway signs
- D. All signs with blue or brown backgrounds
- E. Bikeway signs that are intended for exclusive use by bicyclists or pedestrians

Compliance methods

The new MUTCD language describes five methods that agencies can use to maintain traffic sign retroreflectivity at or above the

minimum levels, including visual nighttime inspection. Agencies can choose from these methods or combine them.

Agencies are allowed to develop other appropriate methods based on engineering studies, as long as the method(s) consistently provide results corresponding to the values in the new standards.

At any one time, some individual signs in a jurisdiction may not meet the minimum retroreflectivity levels. As long as the agency has a management plan in place and is maintaining signs in accordance with Section 2A.09 of the MUTCD, the agency will be considered to be in compliance.

For more information

Contact Tom McDonald for more information about the new regulations or sign management software, or to arrange training, 515-294-6348, tmcdonal@iastate.edu.

Some information in this article is excerpted from a short, straightforward FHWA brochure, "Know Your Retro: New MUTCD Sign Retroreflectivity Requirements." This useful publication provides details about the new requirements, including a table of minimum standards for various signs. The brochure is online at www.tsp2.org/news/Retroreflectivity_Brochure.pdf.

Information about three sign management software products can be found online, www.rowekamp.com/SimpleSigns.htm; www.ecountyworks.com/page.php?10#SM; and <http://www.cartograph.com/signview.html>. Other products may also be available.

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Three major deadlines for sign retroreflectivity compliance

| Date | Aspect of Compliance |
|--------------|---|
| January 2012 | Sign assessment or management plan in place |
| January 2015 | Regulatory, warning, and ground-mounted signs |
| January 2018 | Overhead guide signs and street name signs |