TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #10

How Are Posted Speed Limits and the Locations of Speed Limit Signs Determined?

Speed limits are generally set at the speed that most drivers travel on a particular roadway. This speed is considered to be reasonable and safe. Signs are posted at locations where drivers may need to be alerted to the speed limit.

Speed limits are set by the speed drivers actually travel

A key principle that helps determine a speed limit is that the safest situation on a roadway is when all vehicles are traveling approximately the same speed. When a speed limit is set unreasonably low, some drivers will tend to ignore it while other drivers will try to obey it. The result is that the roadway will carry both fast-moving and slow-moving vehicles, which may lead to a crash. Strange as it may seem, it is safer for all drivers to travel at the same high or low speed than for some drivers to drive fast and some to drive slowly.

Therefore, speeds are usually set based on the speed that most people drive on a particular roadway.

Other factors

Iowa drivers are expected to know that the speed limit is 20 mph in business districts, 25 mph in residential and school districts, 45 mph in suburban districts, and 55 mph on highways unless otherwise posted. The speed limit of any given segment of roadway may be increased from these standards if the results of an engineering and traffic study indicate that a higher speed limit would be more reasonable and safer.

Other factors may also be considered in setting speed limits, including roadway surface conditions, roadside development, pedestrian and parking activity, and the crash history at the location.

Speed limits are posted where they will alert or remind drivers of the speed limit

Speed limit signs must be located at points of change from one speed limit to another, beyond major intersections, and at other locations where it is necessary to remind road users of the applicable speed limit.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.