

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #10

How are speed limits set? And how do you decide where to put speed limit signs?

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

Speed limits set by what speed drivers actually travel

One principle that helps determine a speed limit is that the safest situation on a roadway is when all the vehicles are traveling about the same speed. When a speed limit is set unreasonably low, some drivers tend to ignore the signs. Other drivers will try to obey the posted speed limit. The result is that the roadway is carrying both fast-moving and slow-moving vehicles, which is the perfect recipe for a crash. Strange as it may seem, it is safer for all drivers to be traveling at the same high or low speed than for some drivers to be driving fast and some driving slowly. Therefore, speeds are usually set based on what most people actually drive.

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 it is deemed that a higher speed limit would be more reasonable and safe. Other factors may also be considered in setting speed limits. These include roadway surface conditions, pedestrian and parking activity, and the record of crashes 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 the beginning of a roadway segment with a different speed limit. Speed limit signs are also often placed near major intersections as a reminder to motorists.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.