

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #20

When do intersections receive stop signs and signals?

It may surprise you to learn that adding stop signs or traffic signals would not necessarily slow drivers down or increase safety at an intersections. In fact, in some cases, especially when the signs or signals do not seem to be needed, some drivers may begin to ignore them. Therefore, officials in your area make careful decisions concerning the use of stop signs and traffic signals. Here are some of the factors they consider:

Too many signs can lead to ineffectiveness

Studies have shown that when stop signs are placed at intersections where they are not really needed, motorists become careless about stopping. Installing traffic signals where they are not needed can also create traffic congestion, add travel time, and frustrate drivers, and these drivers may become impatient and make unsafe maneuvers.

The use of signs and signals should be restricted to locations where they will be effective

Signs and signals are only effective and should only be used when they meet the following four requirements. They should (1) fulfill a need, (2) convey a clear, simple meaning, (3) command attention and respect, and (4) give adequate time for drivers to respond.

Locations must have one or more of the following the conditions for two-way stop signs to be installed:

- an intersection of a minor and a major road, where the application of the normal right-of-rule would be hazardous;
- a street enters a highway;
- an unsignalized intersection in a signalized area;
- there is high-speed traffic, it is hard to see, and there is a previous crash record.

Four-way stop signs are often used at the intersection of two roadways that contain similar traffic volumes. The location must have at least one of the following conditions:

- a traffic signal is going to be installed and the intersection needs a temporary solution to control the traffic;
- within 12 months at least five crashes have occurred at the intersection that could have been prevented by stop signs;
- relatively high volumes and/or high major-street vehicle speeds exist.

At least one of 11 conditions must be met for a traffic signal to be installed. The conditions include high vehicle and/or pedestrian volumes, a record of severe crashes, and school crossings where there is not enough of a gap in traffic flow for children to cross safely.

Other options

To make travel efficient and safe and to help ensure the proper observance of stop signs and traffic signals, they are installed only where they are absolutely necessary. Other solutions—for example, a yield sign—should be considered first and may be more appropriate.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.