

STOP SIGNS

Are They Right for Your Neighborhood?



As more and more vehicles are on our streets, traffic volumes seem to continuously grow and speeds seem to increase on many streets. These concerns are reflected in the increasing number of calls being received by the City of Buffalo. Many of those calls are also asking for installation of stop signs to divert or slow traffic.

Do stop signs really work or are they just another symbol that really does not deter traffic? Does a stop sign installation create larger traffic problems? Are they effective in slowing and diverting traffic? Several studies of stop signs installed for this very purpose don't back up the commonly held beliefs. A stop sign is one of the most valuable and effective traffic control devices, when used at the right place and under the right conditions. It can also create a dangerous situation and diminish the effectiveness of other signs when improperly used.

So why not have a stop sign installed when a neighborhood requests it?

Speeds aren't reduced by stop sign installation. Studies have shown that speeds can actually increase between stop signs, up to 3-5 mph faster. Some drivers are irritated by "speed control stop signs" and develop tendencies to make up for lost time by over-accelerating or traveling at higher speeds.

Diversion of traffic is not often achieved through stop sign use. Most of the traffic on the street is there by choice and installation of a stop sign will not cause the traffic to re-route itself. While stop signs may divert a small amount of traffic, the diverted traffic may simply choose a residential street as easy as choosing a more regional roadway.

Effectiveness of stop signs is much lower than most people believe. At unwarranted stop signs, where the motorists are not certain why the sign has been installed, the compliance is relatively poor.

Noise, air quality and accidents from decelerating and accelerating vehicles. Residents adjacent to a stop sign may see lower speeds. There also tends to be more noise, an increased incidence of rear end collisions and an air quality element associated with vehicle stops at intersections.

Creating a false sense of security. Installation of a stop sign does not improve safety or provide a secure or safe haven for children to play. Children should be actively discouraged from playing in or directly adjacent to any street regardless of volume.

So where are stop signs justified?

Stop signs are installed when meeting the Mn/DOT guidelines and "warrants" relating to traffic volume, visibility, and traffic flow. These criteria are included as part of a detailed study. By applying consistent criteria to all intersections we are able to insure uniformity of sign placement. Maintaining uniformity helps to preserve the expectation of drivers that all stop signs are important and command their attention.

Traffic Volume

Traffic volumes may suggest a need for a stop sign, with a lower volume street typically qualifying for a stop sign as it intersects a higher volume street.

Accidents

The frequency of accidents at an intersection may suggest a need for additional traffic control devices.

Other Conditions

Stop signs can also be installed at local street intersections where there is a specific hazard, such as limited sight distance and where volume of traffic and hazard combine to make stop sign controls effective.

National studies have shown that accident rates have actually increased at intersections where stop signs have been installed without meeting warrants or where circumstances did not justify the installation. Reasons for this include drivers ignoring what they perceive to be an unnecessary stop sign, too many stop signs along a roadway, or pedestrians believing that vehicles will stop at a stop sign.

If after reading this information, your neighborhood believes the City should consider the installation of a stop sign, please send a letter outlining your request to:

City of Buffalo - 212 Central Ave