

STOP SIGNS

WHY DON'T THEY PUT IN MORE STOP SIGNS?

A stop sign is one of our most valuable and effective control devices when used at the right place and under the right conditions. It is intended to help drivers and pedestrians at an intersection decide who has the right-of-way.

~~One common misuse of stop signs is to arbitrarily interrupt through traffic, either by causing it to stop, or by causing such an inconvenience as to force the traffic to use other routes. Where stop signs are installed as "nuisances" or "speed breakers," there is a high incidence of intentional violation. In those locations where vehicles do stop, the speed reduction is effective only in the immediate vicinity of the stop sign, and frequently speeds are actually higher between intersections. For these reasons, it should not be used as a speed control device.~~

A school crossing may look dangerous for children to use, causing parents to demand a stop sign to halt traffic. Now a vehicle which had been a problem for 3 seconds while approaching and passing the intersection becomes a problem for a much longer period. A situation of indecision is created as to when to cross as a pedestrian or when to start as a motorist. Normal gaps in traffic through which crossings could be made safely no longer exist. An intersection which previously was not busy now looks like a major intersection. It really isn't — it just looks like it. It doesn't even look safer and it usually isn't.

Most drivers are reasonable and prudent with no intention of maliciously violating traffic regulations; however, when an unreasonable restriction is imposed, it may result in flagrant violations. In such cases, the stop sign can create a false sense of security in a pedestrian and an attitude of contempt in a motorist. These two attitudes can and often do conflict with tragic results.

Well-developed, nationally recognized guidelines help to indicate when such controls become necessary. These guidelines take into consideration, among other things, the probability of vehicles arriving at an intersection at the same time, the length of time traffic must wait to enter, and the availability of safe crossing opportunities.

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Put a Stop Sign There and Slow Down Traffic: WRONG!

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Many local and county officials are often pressured by constituents to put in STOP signs at intersections where the citizens of the neighborhood want to interrupt traffic, either by making the vehicles stop or by making it an inconvenience so that the traffic will use more expedient routes. This is a bad practice and will usually create more problems than they solve.



Studies from around the country show that there is a high incidence of intentional violations where the STOP signs are installed as a speed deterrent. These studies showed the speed was reduced in the immediate vicinity of the sign but the speeds were actually higher between intersections than they would have been if the signs had not been there.

When installed correctly, a STOP sign will tell the driver and pedestrian who has the right-of-way. The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices contains criteria which must be met in order to justify the installation of STOP signs as well as traffic control devices. Among other things, these criteria consider traffic speed, sight distance, traffic volume and the frequency of gaps that occur in the traffic that would allow for safe vehicle entry or pedestrian crossing.

Most drivers are reasonable, but when faced with unreasonable restrictions, they may violate them and develop contempt for other traffic controls. Not only is this dangerous for the driver but for the responsible agency as well. Unwarranted or substandard traffic control devices contributing to an accident can sometimes be grounds to award a judgment against an agency involved in a lawsuit.

Source: Excerpted from the Mississippi
Transportation Technology Update, December
1993.