

# **COLUMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

## **CHILDREN AT PLAY SIGNS PROCEDURE**



**Columbia County  
Engineering Services Division  
Traffic Engineering & Operations Department  
(706) 868-4223**

**Adopted March 30, 2021**

**CHILDREN AT PLAY SIGNS**

**CHILDREN AT PLAY, WATCH FOR CHILDREN, DEAF CHILD, BLIND CHILD, AUTISTIC CHILD, ETC**

At first glance, it might seem that a CHILDREN AT PLAY sign would help protect neighborhood youngsters from traffic hazards. It doesn't. In fact, these signs send an unclear message about what the driver and the child are supposed to do. Because of that, these signs are seldom effective. This also applies to DEAF CHILD, AUTISTIC CHILD, BLIND CHILD, or similar warning signs.

**A. THESE SIGNS SEND THE WRONG MESSAGE**

Children should not be encouraged to play in the street, and they should be taught to look before crossing or darting out into the street. The CHILDREN AT PLAY sign may well be understood by kids and families as a suggestion that it is acceptable for children to play in the street, and, thus, produces a false sense of security. Furthermore, CHILDREN AT PLAY signs tend to propagate through neighborhoods, popping up on every block that has a child living on it. Signs lose credibility with motorists when they appear too often. Instead of being extra diligent, drivers tend to ignore the signs, particularly if no children are playing near the CHILDREN AT PLAY signs. Also, when these signs appear too often, they raise questions like: if there is no sign does that mean there are no children present and no need to watch for children?

**B. THESE SIGNS ARE NOT ENFORCEABLE**

Such signs also provide no guidance to motorists in terms of a safe speed, and the sign has no legal basis for determining what a motorist should do. Furthermore, motorists should expect children to be "at play" in all residential areas, and the lack of signing on some streets may indicate otherwise. The signs are unenforceable and act as another roadside obstacle to pedestrians and errant motorists. Use of these non-standard signs may also imply that the involved jurisdiction approves of streets as playgrounds, which may result in the jurisdiction being vulnerable to tort liability.

[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/univcourse/swless14.htm](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/univcourse/swless14.htm)

**C. THESE SIGNS ARE NOT EFFECTIVE**

The Institute of Transportation Engineer's (ITE's) Design and Safety of Pedestrian Facilities states that "No accident-based studies have been able to determine the effectiveness of [such] warning signs." ITE's Traffic Control Devices Handbook, states that "Children at Play" and "Slow Children" signs should not be used since they may encourage children to play in the street and may encourage parents to be less vigilant. The National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Synthesis of Highway Practice No. 186: Supplemental Advance Warning Devices (1993) states that these signs are "not considered effective." It is also noted that "The use of this sign and its variations has been discouraged by many agencies because the message implies that it is acceptable for children to be playing in the street. It is nonstandard due to the use of a symbol not contained in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)".

**D. THE SIGNS ARE NOT APPROVED BY THE MUTCD**

Columbia County Traffic Engineering and Operations follows the MUTCD, the national standard for traffic signs. The MUTCD does not designate DEAF CHILD, AUTISTIC CHILD, BLIND

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CHILD, CHILDREN AT PLAY, or other similar warning signs. The MUTCD requires that “*all regulatory and warning signs installed on public roads and streets within recreational and cultural interest areas shall conform to the requirements*” regarding general, regulatory and warning signs.  
[http:// mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/](http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/)

The only similar signs approved are the W11-2 Pedestrian and the W15-1 Playground signs.

However, the MUTCD does allow for additional regulatory, warning, or guidance information subject to specific cautionary guidelines: “*The use of warning signs should be kept to a minimum as the unnecessary use of warning signs tends to breed disrespect for all signs.*”

<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/HTM/2003r1/part2/part2c.htm#section2C02>