

CHILDREN RELATED ROADSIDE SIGNAGE

It is Cache County's administrative policy (in compliance with Cache County code §12.01.020) to not install "CHILDREN AT PLAY", "SLOW - CHILDREN PLAYING" and/or "DEAF/BLIND CHILD" signs along County roadways. Instead, the County focuses on the enforcement of existing traffic laws in areas of concern as raised by citizens. Since the primary concern is speed and/or the unsafe operation of vehicles, the County will utilize appropriate methods to attempt to control those issues including the use of Sheriff deputies as necessary. Where safety concerns exist due to roadway or roadside conditions, road audits will be performed.

Cache County has in the past posted these types of signs along County roads but has since discontinued the use of these signs and removes them as they are found. These signs have not been shown to increase driver awareness and are not recognized as a standard highway sign by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE).¹ Studies have shown no evidence that these signs prevent pedestrian accidents or decrease vehicle speeds. The Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) included a change in their policies for warning signs such as the 'children present' and similar warnings in the 2003 revision and again in late 2009: "*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.*"² In addition, a State of Wisconsin DOT, Bureau of Highway Operations study³ "cited a number of 'common sense' observations indicating that these signs:

- Do not give clear and enforceable guidance to drivers
- Provide a false sense of security to parents and children and therefore may increase the risk
- Expose municipalities to liability
- Give a false impression that areas without the signs do not have children"⁴

Children should not play within County roadways as the general high speed nature (45mph on unposted roads), narrowness, and rural nature of the roads is not conducive to a safe environment. It is also impractical (and would render the signage meaningless) to consider placing these signs on every road that may have children. Warning signs are effective tools if used sparingly to warn motorists of uncommon hazards that are not apparent to drivers. The use of unnecessary signs generally promotes disrespect for all signs. To address pedestrian safety, specific warning signs for school zones, pedestrian crossings, playgrounds and other recreational areas are used where they are truly warranted.

¹ <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/pedbike/05085/chapt10.cfm>

10.5 Warning Signs

According to the ITE publication, *Traffic Control Devices Handbook*, CAUTION—CHILDREN AT PLAY or 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. Such signs also provide no guidance to motorists as to 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 nonstandard signs may also imply that the involved jurisdiction approves of streets as playgrounds, which may result in the jurisdiction being vulnerable to tort liability.

² <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/HTM/2003r1/part2/part2c.htm#section2C02>

³ <http://www.ci.rio-rancho.nm.us/DocumentCenter/View/63044>

⁴ <http://www.nymir.org/members/documents/0611ChildrenatPlay.pdf>