

WHY ARE THOSE STOP SIGNS SO HIGH?

Traffic engineers have received calls from concerned citizens asking "Aren't those new STOP signs rather high?" In Florida, as in most states, the standard for signs, signals and pavement markings is the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices" (MUTCD). This publication by the U.S. Department of Transportation, serves as the standard for the installation of all traffic control devices.

Mounting Height Standard:

The MUTCD states: "Signs installed at the side of the road in rural districts shall be at least 5 feet, measured from the bottom of the sign to the near edge of the pavement. Where parking or pedestrian movements occur, the clearance to the bottom of the sign shall be at least 7 feet. Directional signs on expressways and freeways shall be installed with a minimum height of 7 feet. If a secondary sign is mounted below another sign, the major sign shall be installed at least 8 feet and the secondary sign at least 5 feet above the level of the pavement edge. All route signs, warning signs, and regulatory signs on expressways and freeways shall be at least 7 feet above the level of the pavement edge. Overhead signs shall provide a vertical clearance of not less than 17 feet to the sign, light fixture, or sign bridge, over the entire width of the pavement and shoulders except where a lesser vertical clearance is used for the design of other structures. The vertical clearance to overhead sign structures or supports shall not be greater than 1 foot in excess of the minimum clearance of other structures."

"Why must signs be so high?" One major reason is the improved visibility that results. In urban areas, parked vehicles and other obstructions can obscure signs that are too low. Also, pedestrians are not likely to collide with properly mounted signs under conditions of reduced visibility (darkness). In rural areas, bushes and even weeds can block signs that are installed too low. Another reason for installing signs high enough is the improved condition and life of the sign. A sign that is 7 feet above the ground is less susceptible to vandalism. It is also less likely to be sprayed with dirt from passing vehicles. And finally, signs mounted at their correct height have been found to command more respect, resulting in higher compliance and lower violation rates, than those that are too low.

Lateral Offset Standard:

Another concern of citizens is the lateral placement of STOP signs from the roadway. The MUTCD states: "The minimum lateral offset from the edge of the shoulder (or if no shoulder exists, from the edge of the pavement) to the near edge of a roadside-mounted sign shall be 6 feet. Roadside-mounted sign supports shall be breakaway, yielding, or shielded with a longitudinal barrier or crash cushion if within the clear zone. The minimum lateral offset from the edge of the shoulder (or if no shoulder exists, from the edge of the pavement) to the near edge of overhead sign supports (cantilever or sign bridges) shall be 6 feet. Overhead sign supports shall have a barrier or crash cushion to shield them if they are within the clear zone."