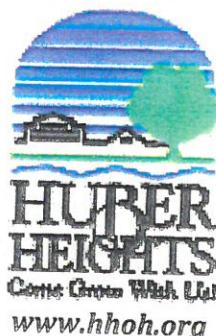


## Cautionary Signs: Do Children at Play, Signs Improve Safety?



### Why Signs Are Not Installed

The main reasons the City of Huber Heights does not generally install "Children at Play" Signs are:

- These signs do not describe where the child might be. Most streets within a residential area have children who react in the same way, and each driver must be aware of all children in a neighborhood environment.
- These signs provide parents and children with a false sense of security that their children are safe when playing in or near the street.
- When the novelty of such a sign wears off, the signs no longer attract the attention of regular passersby.
- Unique or unusual warning signs are a target for vandals and souvenir hunters and have a high replacement costs.
- Unique message signs have no legal meaning or established precedent for use in basic traffic engineering references. Their use is discouraged because of both the lack of proven effectiveness and undesirable liability exposure.



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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.

The City of Huber Heights follows the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the national standard for traffic signs. The MUTCD does not designate CHILDREN AT PLAY 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://www.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 of all signs."*

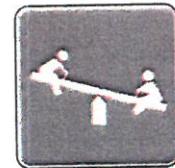
## These Signs Send The Wrong Message

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. 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?

### Sign's Are Not Effective

The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) 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 MUTCD."

## 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.

## Existing Signs Should be Removed

NCHRP Synthesis of Highway Practice No. 139

Pedestrians and Traffic-Control Measures (1988) states that "non-uniform signs such as 'CAUTION- CHILDREN AT PLAY' 'SLOW-CHILDREN,' or similar legends should not be permitted on any roadway at any time" and that "the removal of any nonstandard signs should carry a high priority."

*City of Huber Heights Engineering Division*