# Safety Signage Toolbox Talk

## WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Safety signs are one of the main means of communicating health and safety information to employees, contractors, service users and members of the public.

Safety signs should be easy to understand and should also be easy to see and read.

Signs and signals should include:

- fire alarms
- illuminated signs
- hazard signs on chemicals
- fire signage/escape routes
- prohibition notices
- warning signs
- hazard signs

## WHAT’S THE DANGER?

### SAFETY SIGN COLOURS

**Red** signs are for prohibition, danger or for alarm. They are round shaped with a black pictogram on a white background and the red edging should be at least 35% of the surface area of the sign.

**Yellow or Amber** are warning signs used for caution or for taking precautions. They will be triangular in shape with a black pictogram on a yellow background with black edges. The yellow part should be at least 50% of the area of the sign.

**Blue** signs are for instruction or for information, for example, wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). They are a round shape with a white pictogram on a blue background. The blue part of the sign should be at least 50% of the area of the sign.

**Green** signs are for emergency escape routes or first aid. They are rectangular in shape with a white pictogram on a green background. The green part of the sign should be at least 50% of the sign.

**Red (fire-fighting signs)** give instructions for and the location of firefighting equipment. They are rectangular in shape with a white pictogram on a red background. The red part of the sign should be at least 50% of the sign.

Safety signs also encompass **NOTICE** signs as well as Safety Instruction signs and keep your workers well-informed. These types of signs will alert workers of where first aid kits are, the locations of emergency eyewash stations, and otherwise give information in a clear and concise manner. ANSI has included these signs to their Z535 standard.

While many signs are mandatory signs to have in the workplace, adding other types of informational signs can greatly contribute to worker's safety. Other types of signs that should be considered include:

- **Traffic control signs:** If a facility has vehicle and pedestrian traffic, stop signs, yield signs, and other types of traffic control signs will keep forklifts and pedestrians safe.
- **Prohibition Signs:** Remind people not to smoke, not to enter certain areas, not to use their cell phone, etc. with prohibition signs.
- **Security signs:** These signs help to protect people and property by keeping people out of certain locations.
- **Office Signs:** Every facility, even a typical office, has a need for safety signs. Signs used for office purposes often provide directions or instructions regarding tasks.

# HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Employers have a duty to use signs to warn workers, contractors and visitors about hazards. Additionally, safety signs reinforce training, meet safety compliance regulations and provide visitors with legally adequate warning, protecting your company from

liability.

One of the easiest ways to warn everyone of **hazards** is to follow **safety sign and marking requirements.**

**Here is an overview of some key steps in meeting requirements set by OSHA and updated regulations:**

**Assessment**

It’s important to properly assess how well signs are used at your worksite. Walk through the workplace and note all hazards as well as the location of existing safety posters, signs, tags and markings.

**Design**

Before deciding on your signs, you need to look through the regulations concerning the specific shape, color and design of safety signs and note all the information you require to be compliant.

- Red is for danger tags that are to be used in major hazard situations where an immediate hazard presents a threat of death or serious injury.
- Orange is for warning tags that signify a hazardous situation that, if not avoided, could result in serious injury or death.
- Yellow is for caution tags that are to be used in minor hazard situations where a potential hazard or unsafe practice presents a lesser threat of an injury.
- Fluorescent orange or red-orange is for biological hazards.

You also need to make sure you understand the difference between different types of signs in order to use them efficiently and correctly. For example:

- Notice signs provide information about equipment, areas, maintenance, instructions, and directions unrelated to personal injuries.
- General safety signs share information relating to first

aid, medical equipment, sanitation and other topics. For example, they can mark emergency exits or eye-wash stations.
- Blue non-hazard signs can cover anything from directions and procedures to marking washrooms. They don't communicate hazards and are purely information-centered.

**Wording**

Your safety signs should use their message (and symbols) to clearly state the nature of the hazard, the consequence of interacting with it, and instructions on how to avoid it.

Don't forget the size of the letters on your sign. Are they large enough to be read from a safe reading distance? Or in unfavorable conditions? Make sure you signs follow the guidelines regarding the correct size of the letters depending on the circumstances.

**Signage Materials**

Signs should be made of the right material for your workplace, hazard area and the environmental conditions. Consider these factors:

- What are the environmental conditions in the area where you want to place the sign? Is it indoor or outdoor? What is the temperature?
- What is the sign's fade resistance? Will it fade quicker due to certain factors?
- What are the lighting conditions? Consider whether your signs have to be seen in the dark or under emergency lighting. Are fluorescent or photo luminescent signs a better option?
- Will the signs be regularly cleaned? Are housekeeping solutions going to damage the sign? Will the sign be affected by washdown conditions?

**Placement**

When affixing and placing the signs in their relevant areas, keep in mind that the signal word **(WARNING, CAUTION, DANGER)** must be readable from at least five feet away (1.52 m). This is because a

person reading the sign must enough have time to follow the sign’s instructions safely.

Signs should be placed so that they are easily noticeable and clearly visible. They mustn’t be obstructed from view or create a hazard themselves (such as a warning sign that prevents the reader from seeing the hazard it’s warning against).

**Training**

Provide training to all employees on the meaning of the signs and tags used in the workplace.

Employees must recognize which signs indicate immediate danger, know the difference between danger and caution signs, and always take proper precautions. Signs might seem clear and understandable, but it’s not enough to put them up and expect everyone to comply. Education and training are a huge part of safety, and if you want to ensure a safe work environment for your workers then training cannot be ignored.

# FINAL WORD

Signage might appear to be a minor aspect of safety, but it helps warn workers of hazards so don’t ignore it, do your research and invest in appropriate and OSHA-compliant signs. You’ll be protecting your workers as well as your company.