

New Sign Retroreflectivity Requirements



One of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA's) primary missions is to improve safety on the nation's roadways. Approximately 42,000 people have been killed on American roads during the last decade. While only one-quarter of all travel occurs at night, about half of the traffic fatalities occur during nighttime hours. To address this disparity, the FHWA has adopted new traffic sign retroreflectivity requirements that are included as Revision 2 of the 2003 MUTCD.

To comply with the new requirements, public agencies will have until January 2012 to implement and then continue to use an assessment or management method that is designed to maintain traffic sign retroreflectivity at or above the minimum levels specified. Five assessment or management methods are defined in the MUTCD as acceptable maintenance methods for traffic signs. Agencies are also permitted to develop and use other methods based on engineering studies.

Public agencies will have until January 2015 to replace any regulatory, warning, or post-mounted guide (except street name) signs and until January 2018 to replace any street name signs and overhead guide signs that are identified by the assessment or management method as failing to meet the minimum retroreflectivity levels.

If an assessment or management method were being used, an agency would comply with the requirements of the new provisions even if there were some individual signs that do not meet the minimum retroreflectivity levels at a particular point in time. Because of the seven to 10-year compliance period adopted for replacing signs that have insufficient retroreflectivity, highway departments will be able to implement improved sign inspection and management procedures and subsequently replace the signs in a period that is consistent with the typical sign replacement cycle.

Sheeting types (as defined in ASTM D4956) that can be used according to the new requirements are as follows:

- All prismatic sheeting materials may be used for all signs.
- High Intensity Beaded (Type III) and Super Engineer Grade (Type II) may be used for all signs except for the white legend on overhead guide signs.
- Engineer Grade (Type I) may be used for all signs except for:
 - The white legend on guide signs,
 - The white legend on street name signs, and
 - All yellow and orange warning signs.

Even though a particular type of sheeting might initially meet the minimum retroreflectivity levels when new, it might quickly degrade to below the minimum retroreflectivity levels. For additional information on this rulemaking and sign retroreflectivity, please visit the FHWA retroreflectivity web site www.fhwa.dot.gov/retro.

