

Warning: Read the Signs in Your Workplace

When do people pay the most attention to signs? It seems to be while driving a car! Have you ever wondered why that is? Most likely it's because signs are the simplest way to direct, instruct, and warn people. During your commute to the jobsite today did you happen to notice all the signs along the way? "You'll need to detour on this road," one tells you. "Slow down, you're driving too fast!" another advises. "Watch out for that bump," you are warned...



Road and travel indicators are not the only signs that direct, instruct and warn. Safety signs at the workplace direct, instruct, and warn employees too. Just as it is dangerous to ignore road signs, it is dangerous to ignore workplace safety signs. These messages are in place to prevent accidents and injury. They alert employees to potential hazards in the workplace.

But as on the roadway, signs at the workplace have different meanings. Let's take a look at a few of the more common of these, their colors, and what the colors symbolize:

- **DANGER:** Danger signs must be black, red and white and warn of immediate danger. Failure to comply could result in serious injury or death.
- **CAUTION:** Caution signs must have a black panel with yellow letters. The background must be yellow, and any letters on the background must be black and warn of potential hazards. They also instruct you to take certain measures to protect yourself.
- **WARNING:** Warning signs have an **orange** background and indicate immediate danger or the potential for serious injury or death if not obeyed.
- **BIOHAZARD:** These have a **fluorescent-orange** or an **orange-red** background to indicate the presence of infectious biological material.
- **SAFETY INSTRUCTION:** Safety instruction signs must have a white background with black letters. The top panel must be green and the signal word must be set in white letters. and give directions for safe procedures.

Correct placement of signs also adds to their effectiveness. Workplace safety signs should be placed as close to the hazard as possible. In some cases, a *Pre-Warning System* is a good idea. This is done by using several signs together, and placing them progressively closer to the hazard before employees come close to the actual danger.

Safety signs should be away from any movable objects, well-illuminated, and protected against fading or other damage.

Unfortunately, safety journals are filled with stories about people who were seriously injured or lost their lives because they failed to observe workplace safety signage. It may be up to your employer to make sure signs are in place, but it's up to *you* to read and obey them! Not doing so can have serious consequences.

Resource: OSHA Sign Standards <https://www.osha.gov/laws-egs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.145>

