

The Role of the Stop Sign

The stop sign is one of the most misunderstood traffic devices around. Each year, people ask for stop signs to be installed to reduce speeding and improve safety.

The purpose of a stop sign is to assign right-of-way at an intersection, not control speed. In fact, experience shows motorists have a tendency to speed up between stop signs when they are overused. Stop signs also do not necessarily improve safety.

When Accidents Occur

Sometimes residents ask for a stop sign to be installed on a street because an accident recently occurred there. However, there are many causes for accidents and they are often random events. Many accidents are the result of driver error and not the fault of poor intersection design or insufficient traffic control.

When several collisions occur at the same location in the city, engineering studies are conducted to determine if there is a need for corrective action. The City considers a variety of measures in addition to stop signs, such as removal of sight obstructions.

Richfield's experience has shown that simply improving the intersection visibility by prohibiting parking or removing vegetation near the intersection is often more effective in reducing traffic accidents than installing stop signs. These measures often reduce the need to install more restrictive intersection controls.

Overuse of Stop Signs

The most effective traffic control is that which intrudes the least on the safe flow of traffic.

The overuse of stop signs reduces their effectiveness. If installed where not justified, stop signs are largely ignored with many drivers not making complete stops. That can result in a serious safety hazard. Good neighborhood traffic control produces smooth trips for the motorist and avoids the "stop and go" effect of excessive stop signs.

The Laws Governing Stop Signs

The use of stop signs is governed by federal and state law and city policies. The federal Uniform Traffic Control Devices Manual dictates the size, shape and color of all traffic signs in addition to providing guidelines for installation. The federal manual helps create uniformity between states.

The State of Minnesota has a similar traffic manual that is in compliance with the federal manual. The City is required by state law to comply with the guidelines of the state traffic control manual.

In addition, the City has adopted policies for the installation of two-way stop signs in residential areas. These policies identify specific traffic volumes, accident history, and any unusual conditions that must be present at the intersection before these traffic control devices may be installed.

Stop Sign Policy

In 2008, the City of Richfield developed a new residential stop sign policy for two-way stop signs with the purpose to provide fair and uniform treatment of stop signs in residential areas by the Richfield Traffic Control Committee. The policy differs from the previous policy, in that it is proactive and provides safer transportation within the city by assigning right of way at all residential intersections.

The policy is as follows:

- Two-way stop signs would be installed on all residential streets in such a way as to create sub-collector streets.
- Uncontrolled intersections would be converted to two-way stop control on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis.
- The placement of stop signs would create sub-collector streets by controlling traffic on all cross streets. In most cases, east-west streets would not have stop signs while north-south streets will be controlled by two-way stop signs. This arrangement discourages drivers from using the local residential roadways, where the majority of houses front, as through streets.
- The Engineering staff would prepare a stop sign plan for each neighborhood. The plan would be submitted to the neighborhood for review and comment before sign installation begins. Modifications to the sub-collector pattern may be made to accommodate bike routes, school bus routes and other relevant factors.
- The Transportation Commission would review all staff requests for stop sign removal and make recommendations to the City Council. As in the previous policy, the City Council remains responsible for removal of stop signs.
- The area north of the Best Buy campus would remain in a Basket Weave stop sign pattern. This neighborhood is bounded by 76th Street, Penn Avenue, 66th Street and 35W.

Citizen Inquiries

The City takes its role in solving traffic problems very seriously, yet, the ultimate burden for safe travel rests with each of us as motorists.

Since Richfield receives many requests each year for all kinds of traffic control measures, the City cannot always investigate each request as quickly as it would like. The City will respond after carefully evaluating your request. Evaluation of the request usually takes about one to two months. Once a decision is made, installation takes about one month. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

If you have questions or requests concerning traffic, please call the Public Works Department at 612-861-9170 to speak with the Transportation Engineer.