

TRAFFIC TECHNICAL BRIEF-I

Why “slow children at play” signs are not recommended

Traffic signs installed in our roadways serve many purposes: speed limits, street names, direction of traffic, need to stop, keep us from running off the road etc. Traffic signs help us to be safe whether we are a motorist, bicyclist, or pedestrian.

Residential streets often serve a purpose more than just roadway for cars. Residents would usually park on the street, but also use the roads or adjacent sidewalks for walking, chatting with neighbors, some front yards allowing sufficient areas for children to play, among others. Often, residents request road signs which they believe will make their neighborhood safer.

Some neighborhoods may have signs such as “slow children at play” or “deaf child area” or “autistic child area” or other similar signs. With the traffic signs serving in an important purpose of guiding the motorists about the rules of the road, the question comes up if these “children at play” signs are effective?



All traffic signs that are used on the roadway follow the national standard for traffic control signs, which is the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The City of Frederick law requires the use of this manual for traffic control.

MUTCD does not approve the use of these signs for various reasons, stating just a few here:

- This sign falls in the category of warning signs, which typically provide information on specific locations of hazard (intersection, pedestrian crossing, curve etc.). However, “children at play” sign merely informs the driver that children may be in or near the road.
- A motorist should generally be aware of the increased possibility of children playing on residential streets, and a lack of signing on some part of the street may indicate otherwise.
- Studies have shown that these signs do not reduce the speed of traffic or make drivers more observant. Over-signage along residential streets where there is already considerable demand for motorist attention can instead, result in distraction.

Some other things that can be alternatively done includes:

- Are there sufficient sidewalks in the neighborhood, or does the high pedestrian volume make sidewalks a consideration?
- Does the roadway have speed limit signs in the area? A speed limit sign sends a clear message to the motorist regarding their speed of travel.
- If there is an area where pedestrians and cyclists are heavily using the road, a pedestrian warning sign may be used.

References:

[University of Connecticut School of Engineering Tech Briefs](#)

[Montgomery County Department of Transportation Traffic Engineering and Operations](#)

[Municipality of Anchorage Traffic Engineering Department Sign Installation Policy](#)