



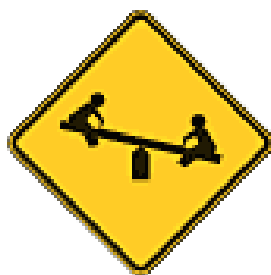
The City's Traffic Engineering Division often receives requests to install "Playground" or "Children at Play" signs.

The *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) regulates the design, use, and placement of signs and markings in the United States. The "Children at Play" sign is considered a warning sign with a word message. It is sometimes used instead of the nationally recognized "Playground" sign (see Figure 1). The purpose of any warning sign is to inform drivers of conditions that they are *likely to consistently* encounter. Drivers begin to ignore warning signs when this is not true.

"CHILDREN AT PLAY" AND "PLAYGROUND" SIGNS

Warning signs should be uniformly designed and often communicate their message most efficiently through the use of symbols. Warning signs that are not consistently uniform can confuse drivers. The "Children at Play" sign (see Figure 2), for example, has several variations. These include "Slow-Children" and "Caution-Children at Play." The MUTCD recommends that all non-uniform signs be removed.

A sign with a similar message, but in symbol form, has been approved for use in the MUTCD. The "Playground" symbol sign is shown in Figure 1. It is recommended in the MUTCD that this sign be placed to warn motorists of a designated playground or a play area with a high volume of children. The placement of this sign is one option for areas where the conflict of children and vehicles may be encountered on a regular basis.



W15-1

Figure 1, W15-1 MUTCD
Playground Sign



Figure 2, Children At Play
Sign, not consistent with
MUTCD standards

We often get requests from parents for "Children at Play" signs to be installed in their neighborhoods. Parents hope that the signs will encourage drivers to slow down and drive cautiously. The concern for the safety of children is very important and is shared by highway and street officials. Unfortunately, "Children at Play" signs may not be the best solution. Here's why:

Placing signs does not slow vehicles

The speeds people choose to drive along a roadway are generally determined by the roadway characteristics and environment and by the level of comfort and safety the driver perceives. In many cases, "Children at Play" or "Playground" (i.e., a sign with children on a teeter-totter) signs are placed along local neighborhood roadways; the users of these roadways are local residents and typically are aware of children in the neighborhood. The characteristics and environment of many local residential roadways also usually produce relatively low speeds. In this type of environment, a reduction in general vehicle speeds through the placement of a "Children at Play" or "Playground" sign should not be expected (especially when the hazard is not consistently clear to the driver).



Signs are used to warn of consistent, not occasional, conditions

Warning signs are effective when they warn drivers of consistent conditions. Because children are not likely to be consistently playing at a particular location in the neighborhood (unlike at playgrounds or parks), “Children at Play” signs placed there could lose their effectiveness. Studies have shown that when signs are overused or indicate conditions that are not likely and consistent, drivers start ignoring the signs.

With or without signs, education and awareness can be important

Even when “Children at Play” signs are used, it may not be a good idea to let your guard down or be lulled into a false sense of safety. Children can benefit from keeping in mind that the street is not a place to play and that not all drivers are necessarily watching out for them.