

# Leaving temporary traffic management signs out – what are the issues?

by Dan Sullivan

At many temporary traffic management sites, it is common to see signs left out unchanged overnight and during other periods when works are not actually happening. When I visit some sites, I hear from contractors and temporary traffic management staff that it is simply easier to leave these signs out as it saves time not having to constantly remove and reinstall the signs the next day. However, my recent work with State and Territory Road Authorities, and with many other industry practitioners has highlighted that this practice is a major concern and in fact it has some serious consequences for safety at your sites.

In this article, I would like to provide you with a short discussion on this topic and why we should all be more proactive in ensuring that signs and traffic control devices are not left out when they are not needed.

Firstly, Best Practice for the industry is described in both the Australian Standard AS1742.3 and the recently published Austroads Guide to Temporary Traffic Management (GTTM). The requirements in these documents are the same as the existing in the guidelines from most States and Territories for many years.

- AS1742.3 (2019) Clause 3.3 states that for “the implementation of a traffic guidance scheme ... signs and devices shall be removed in a defined order from a work site when no longer applicable or required.”
- Part 1 of the GTTM identifies in Section 5.2 on the Principles for temporary traffic management that “signs and devices shall be appropriate to the conditions at the worksite” and “removed from a worksite as soon as practicable”.
- Part 3 of the GTTM in the design of the Traffic Guidance Scheme contains an entire section (7.4) on Redundant Devices. This states that
  - Redundant equipment is signs, supports, bases, delineators or other equipment not in current use. This includes equipment not required when the site is left unattended. Redundant equipment shall not be left standing. All redundant equipment shall be removed from the site or placed in a safe, secure location within the worksite. Consider the following when storing redundant equipment:
  - The equipment does not remain on site and unused for a period greater than 48 hours unless securely stored.
  - The equipment is stored in a safe location where it will not pose a hazard to any person or property.
  - The equipment shall not be stored or placed on an open footpath or bicycle path.
  - The equipment is stored at least 6 m clear from traffic.
  - The equipment is not stored in a location which is visible to traffic and which could be confused with installed devices, especially at night with retroreflective components.
- Part 6 of the GTTM in the Guide for Field Staff identifies that “Important Basic Principles to be observed are as follows ... signs and devices shall be appropriate to the conditions at the worksite” and that “signs and devices shall be placed before work begins and removed as soon as they are no longer required”.

In many cases therefore, it is likely that leaving traffic control signs and devices out will not be compliant with jurisdictional requirements and could end up in penalties. In a worse case scenario, Work Health and Safety Inspectors may actually deem that these non-compliances could have contributed to a serious crash or incident at a site.

An issue that we should all consider is how we want the public and the politicians to view the perceived Professionalism of our industry. Many of you have shared stories with me of the members of the public who have ignored the signs and devices. However, I can share stories with you of the many, many sites that I have driven through obeying the reduced speed limits and looking out for workers and traffic controllers when the signs tell me they are there, to find that there is no one on site at all.

A survey commissioned by the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads found that most of the public considered that most traffic management signage was advisory only because most of the time no one was there. The Victorian government has gone even further now introducing legislation that empowers staff from the Department of Transport, formerly Vicroads, to undertake audits and fine companies who leave out temporary traffic management signs when they are not required. This particularly relates to Speed Limits Signs which are not needed.

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This shows that a large portion of the public and the politicians believe that we leave out signs when we don't need them. The reasons quoted to me by the public is that traffic controllers just don't care about the impact they have on traffic. The public therefore often do not respect our workers or their sites because there are so many sites out there that do not conform.

Speaking with members of our own industry across Australia, most have identified that many sites (not their own) have signs left out and generally we then ignore them. If we in the temporary traffic management industry ourselves don't believe most of the signs that are left out are real, then what hope do we have convincing the public to obey us.

So, what is really wrong with all of this? We really need to think about the effect that this has in confusing motorists and in ensuring that drivers obey the signs that we put out.

Vehicles controlled by a driver represent one of the largest risks to our workforce on and near the road. To ensure that a site is safe for road workers and road users, we need drivers to therefore understand and respect the traffic control devices that we place on the road. However, when drivers often see devices that they consider redundant, that are left out when the need for them no longer exists, the tendency is to then ignore those signs in the future. Consequently, it is highly likely that there is a reduced chance that drivers will obey signs and devices at future sites that they encounter which then increases the risk to workers at your site and at other sites.

If you think of the situation where you driver though one site with all the signs out and then see nothing. Then you drive through a second and the same thing happens. How likely is that you will just obey the signs a third time. And this third site may be yours where you have workers close to the road.

If we want drivers to "see the cones" and "obey the zones" we need drivers to believe that when they see these devices they are real and that works really are going on.

### **Some of the signs that I would like to focus on first include;**

- Worker Symbolic Sign – this sign was developed with its special colour to advise drivers that there are workers directly ahead working on or near a road and that the driver needs to take particular care. When a driver sees this sign, they should typically then see a worker, close to the road (i.e. within 6m) with the next ten seconds of driving. If a driver sees this sign and then does not see workers it loses its immediate effect and just becomes another general sign advising that maybe works are happening
- Traffic Controller Ahead sign – this is critical to protect our traffic controllers on the road like the Worker Symbolic Sign. Immediately after passing this sign, the location of the traffic controller should become evident. Particular care is needed when the traffic controller is working only intermittently. Best practice would be to uncover the sign immediately before the TC starts operations and then cover it again when the task is completed.
- Speed limit signs – speed limits should be directly applicable to the site. Speed limits left up "just because" there might be a hazard is not very scientific and then they tend to be ignored. Speed limits should be set as high as is reasonable and signs should never be left in place because it is inconvenient to remove them.
- Roadwork ahead – there should be other signs and devices ahead which a driver needs to react to. Do not use this sign when works have finished but there is no impact on the traffic lane.

It is up to all of us in the industry to be proactive in ensuring that redundant signs and devices are no longer left out. We need to call out those who are offending as it not only reflects their professionalism, but it potentially endangers us all.

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