

Compliance Dates For Sign Retroreflectivity

Sign visibility is getting much more attention in the 2009 edition of the Manual of Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Retroreflectivity is one of the areas where greater emphasis has been placed.

In 1993, Congress mandated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was to come up with a standard of minimum retroreflectivity for signage and pavement markings. This standard would address the issue of various sheeting materials manufacturers using different methods of measuring the effectiveness of their products under nighttime conditions.

Following years of testing at Texas A & M University, a minimum standard was developed. FHWA published that data and a proposed rule change in the Federal Register. After comment evaluations were completed, the Final Rule was published in the MUTCD. This rule provided minimum standards that applied to all manufacturers of sheeting materials and could be measured by the same retroreflectometer. It also set compliance dates by which all signage would have to meet minimum requirements.

The first deadline is coming up on January 22, 2012. This standard is in Section 2A.08 of the 2009 edition of the MUTCD.

The MUTCD states: Standard – Public agencies or officials having jurisdiction shall use an assessment or management method that is designed to maintain sign retroreflectivity at or above the minimum levels in Table 2A-3.

Simply stated, you will need an inventory of your regulatory, warning, and guide signs and object



markers. You will also need to conduct visual daytime and nighttime inspections and taken measurements with a retroreflectometer. Section 2A.08 also excludes certain signs.

The second deadline is January 22, 2015. It requires replacement of regulatory, warning, and post mounted guide (except street name) signs that are identified through your inspections and retroreflectometer measurements as failing to meet the minimum levels.

The third deadline will be January 22, 2018. This requires that street name signs and overhead signs that don't meet the minimum levels have to be replaced.

HOWEVER, FHWA has proposed revisions to these compliance dates. The comment period ended on October 31, 2011 and it will be a few months before the comments have been evaluated.

First compliance date of January 22, 2012 could be extended to two years after the rule becomes final and



Photo taken from http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/roadway_dept/night_visib/policy_guide/fhwasa08001/

will only apply to regulatory and warning signs.

The compliance dates for replacing any signs found not to meet minimum sign retroreflectivity levels by January 22, 2015 and 2018 could be eliminated. Signs not meeting minimum reflectivity levels would still need to be replaced but there would be no specific date to replace them. That gives the agency the flexibility to schedule replacement.

But the jurisdiction would need to be prepared to defend its replacement scheduling decisions if liability issues arise.

ADOT is in the process of writing a supplement to the MUTCD and it should be available in January 2012.

As part of the Technical Assistance Program (AZ LTAP) Center Equipment Loan Program, we have a retroreflectometer (Retrosign 4500) available for use on a two week period that we loan free of charge to contributing member agencies. The device may be picked up or the agency can request that an LTAP instructor deliver the device and provide hands on training. The device is GPS equipped and downloads data in an Excel format.



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