

Safety Signs at Work

Signs may:

- Forbid specific actions or activities
- Warn of pipework carrying dangerous substances
- Warn of moving vehicles in a workplace
- Tell people to wear personal protective equipment
- Provide information on the location of first aid equipment

You will also be required to display **FIRE SAFETY** signs to:

- Point to emergency escape routes and exit doors,
- Mark all exit doors in public places
- Identify the location of fire extinguishers.

You must look after any signs you put up, explain clearly to employees what unfamiliar signs mean and tell them what they need to do if they see a safety sign. Including text along with the sign can help this. In some cases you may also have to use illuminated signs, audio or hand signals and verbal commands.

Types of Safety Signs

Pictures used in signs need to be as simple as possible containing only the necessary detail. The required features of the FOUR types of signboard and FIRE safety signs are described below. An example of each type of sign is also shown.

PROHIBITION SIGN

This is a sign that prohibits behaviour likely to increase or cause danger. It is always ROUND in shape, and includes a black picture on a white background with red edging and red diagonal line (the red part should take up at least 35% of the area of the sign).

Example:



No smoking

WARNING SIGN

This is a sign giving warning of a hazard or danger.

It is TRIANGULAR in shape, and includes a black picture on a yellow background with black edging (the yellow part to take up at least 50% of the area of the sign).

Example:



Danger: electricity

MANDATORY SIGN

This is a sign prescribing specific behaviour.

It is ROUND in shape, and includes a white picture on a blue background (the blue part to take up at least 50% of the area of the sign).

Example:



Safety helmet
must be worn

EMERGENCY ESCAPE or FIRST-AID SIGN

This is a sign giving information on emergency exits, first-aid, or rescue facilities.

It can be RECTANGULAR or SQUARE in shape, and includes a white picture on a green background (the green part to take up at least 50% of the area of the sign).

Example:



FIRE-FIGHTING SIGNS

This sign provides information on the identification or location of fire-fighting equipment. It can be RECTANGULAR or SQUARE in shape, and includes a white picture on a red background (the red part to take up at least 50% of the area of the sign).

Example:



Fire extinguisher

Further examples of the different types of signboards that are acceptable can be found at the following web site:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1996/Uksi_19960341_en_2.htm

If a suitable signboard is not available then it is acceptable to design your own, providing it conforms to the general principles listed above.

Using signs on containers and pipes

Containers, tanks and vessels used in the workplace to contain dangerous substances, and the visible pipes in the workplace containing or transporting dangerous substances, will in general need to have signs or labels fixed to them. There are however a number of exceptions:

- a) It may not be necessary to affix signs to pipes where the pipe is short and connected to a container which is clearly signed, such as a welding set;
- b) Containers need not be labelled where the contents may change regularly (for example chemical process vessels and pipework which are not dedicated to one substance). In these cases employers need other arrangements for ensuring that employees know the dangerous properties of the contents of the container; for example, employers could provide suitable process instruction sheets or training for employees.

Where signs or labels are used they may include additional information, such as the name of the dangerous substance or preparation and details of the hazard.

The signs or labels need to be mounted on the sides that are visible, and to be hardwearing. Labels can be in self-adhesive or painted form.

Signs or labels will be most useful at points where employees are likely to be exposed to the contents of the pipework, for example sampling or filling points, drain valves, and flanged joints which are likely to need periodic breaking.

Using signs to mark areas, rooms and enclosures.

It is important to mark those areas, rooms or enclosures used for the storage of large quantities of dangerous substances or preparations by a suitable warning sign, unless the warning labels on individual containers are clearly visible from outside or nearby.

The signs or labels need to be positioned near storage areas or on doors leading into storage rooms.

Using signs to mark obstacles, dangerous locations and traffic routes.

It is important to prevent injuries from persons falling from height or by being struck by falling objects. In most cases secure fencing is needed to prevent falls. However, where the risk is low or where it is impracticable to protect by other means, marking the dangerous location may be necessary – e.g highlighting the edge of a raised platform or area where objects may fall using markings consisting of yellow and black (or red and white) stripes as shown below.



Where it is necessary within a workplace to mark out a traffic route it is required for markings to take the form of continuous lines, preferably yellow or white.

Traffic routes in built-up areas outdoors do not need to be marked if suitable pavements or barriers are already provided.

Outdoor traffic routes, in areas that are not built up, do not need to be marked as the risks to the health and safety of employees are likely to be low.

Using acoustic signals and illuminated signs

Some types of work equipment have to include a warning or warning devices necessary for reasons of health and safety. This could include the use of audio signals and illuminated signs instead of conventional signboards.

Acoustic (or Audio) signals:

So that they can be heard this type of signal needs to be set at a level that is noticeably higher than the normal level of noise found in the workplace. You need to make sure the level is neither excessive nor painful. It is also important for signals to be easily recognisable.

Illuminated signs:

The sign has to be bright enough to be seen, without causing glare. The luminous area of the sign may be of a single safety colour or contain a picture on a specified background.

If an illuminated sign can be either 'on' continuously or operate now and then (ie flash on and off), use the flashing sign to indicate a higher level of danger or a more urgent need for involvement or action.

Using hand signals to direct hazardous operations.

Hand signals can be used to direct hazardous operations such as crane or vehicle manoeuvres. Ensure that the signals are precise, simple, easy to make and to understand.

Check also that the signaller is competent to make hand signals, and is trained in their correct use.

Examples of suitable hand signals to be used in a workplace can be found at the following web site:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1996/Uksi_19960341_en_2.htm

If hand signals are used it is important that they are used consistently throughout a workplace. If employees are unfamiliar with the code in use then suitable training is necessary.

Using verbal signals to direct hazardous operations.

Verbal signals can also be used to direct hazardous operations. Such signals can be spoken messages given either by human or artificial voice, and either directly or recorded. Spoken messages need to be clear, concise, and understood by the listener.

The people involved need a good knowledge of the language used so that they are able to pronounce and understand the spoken message correctly and react accordingly.

Where English is not the first language of most staff the codes do not necessarily have to be in English.