



## Street Department

901 N. Nelson  
Spokane, WA 99202

Informational Handouts

# School Zones



## What are school zones?

School Zones are areas near marked school crosswalks installed adjacent to school grounds. The crosswalks are normally placed where it is desired for school children to cross at a single location. For elementary school age students these locations may be monitored by a crossing guard or school patrol.

Washington law in regard to driving speed in a designated school zones specifies "Speed 20 miles per hour when children are present." This reduced speed is in effect 24 hours per day, not just during crossing hours.

Parking may be removed in the vicinity of school crosswalks to allow motorists to see children and reduce speed slowly, thus minimizing the risk of rear end collisions.

The underlying philosophy for school crosswalk planning emphasizes pedestrian demand. When crosswalks are confined to heavily used locations, motorists are apt to be more alert when approaching them. If we were to install crosswalks in little used locations, drivers would become oblivious to them, and the effectiveness of all crosswalks would be significantly reduced.

## What are the official guidelines?

The State of Washington Revised Code (RCW or State Law) states: "It shall be unlawful for a driver of any vehicle to operate the vehicle in excess of 20 miles per hour when passing any marked school crosswalk when such crosswalk is fully posted with standard school speed limit signs." The RCW further states: "The speed zone at the (school) crosswalk shall extend three hundred feet in either direction from the marked crosswalk."

The RCW's also require all governmental agencies within the state to follow the national guidelines for traffic control devices. These guidelines are contained within the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices" (MUTCD). The MUTCD covers all aspects of the placement, construction, and maintenance of every form of approved traffic control.

## Where would we normally expect to see marked school crosswalks?

School crosswalks are normally marked at, or adjacent to, elementary schools. Other locations may also be marked if: they are part of an approved school walking route and the crossing is at an intersection where there is a substantial conflict between vehicle and pedestrian movements; or where significant school age pedestrian concentrations occur; or where pedestrians could not otherwise recognize the proper place to cross. Examples of such locations are:



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- Approved school crossings with either adult crossing guard or school patrol.
- Signalized intersections where there are pedestrian signals and where one or more crossing locations have been prohibited.

These examples follow the philosophy of marking crosswalks as a form of encouragement. In the first case, we are encouraging school children to use a crossing, which is normally being monitored. In the second case, we are encouraging all pedestrians to avoid a prohibited crossing.

### Why are high schools signed differently?

Because of the age and experience of the high school students, the Speed Limit 20 When Children Are Present, is not appropriate since these students are able to better judge when and where it is safe for them to cross.

However, since high schools are **open** campuses, as opposed to **closed** campus at elementary schools, the high school students may be entering and leaving the school grounds at any time during the school day. Therefore, a Speed Limit 20 7:30 to 3:30, is in effect at all high schools in Spokane.

### Why do some crossings have “flashers” and crossing guards and others do not?

By State guidelines school speed beacons (flashers) are considered to be extra-ordinary devices. As such, they should only be installed at those locations where it may be desirable for addition emphasis. For instance, locations where the street has a high traffic volume are candidates for school crossing flashers, installed and maintained by the City of Spokane.

Related to the school flashers is a common question *why are the flashing lights yellow instead of red?* The answer to this is from the MUTCD and the state laws. Red lights are only for permanent stop situations. A school crossing is not permanent, but variable, based on time of day, day of week and season of the year. The yellow flashing lights are a warning to motorists. The crossing guards by state law can STOP traffic when they display their crossing flags with the word STOP on them.

The same is true for adult crossing guards. The guards go through specialized training and are employed by the school district. They are typically placed where there is a large amount of young school age students crossing an uncontrolled street. An uncontrolled street is one where there is no stop or yield sign or traffic signal. Typically the street being crossed has high traffic volumes with inadequate gaps for the students to cross without the guard artificially creating the gaps in the street traffic flow.



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### **How do we request a designated school crossing?**

The Spokane School District, through the office of Transportation and Safety, may request the City to investigate the need for a marked school crosswalk. If a school crossing is warranted the City will then install the appropriate signs and markings.

While the City of Spokane and the Spokane School District are dedicated to traffic safety, we have had to resign ourselves to the fact that we cannot fill all needs or requests to the public's satisfaction. Upon occasion requests are denied. Our response to requests for marking crosswalks is cautious, for test after test has proven that an unwarranted marked crosswalk can be three or four times as dangerous to pedestrians as a unmarked crosswalk.

If you have any questions about School Zones, please contact the City of Spokane, Traffic Operations Division at (509) 232-8800.