



## Street Department

901 N. Nelson  
Spokane, WA 99202

Informational Handouts

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# Speed Zones

## How are speed limits established?

Speed zones (limits) are established based upon the concept of reasonable speed. A common misconception is that by posting a lower speed zone, motorists will slow down. The facts consistently prove otherwise. As drivers, we are influenced by roadway and traffic conditions much more than by the posted speed limit.

The posting of the appropriate speed limit simplifies the job of enforcement officers, since most of the traffic is voluntarily moving at the posted speed. Blatant speeders are easily spotted, safe drivers are not penalized, and patrol officers aren't asked to enforce unrealistic and arbitrary speed limits.

Generally, about 85 to 90 percent of us drive at a reasonable and safe speed. When speeds are posted for less than a reasonable and safe speed, we tend to ignore the signs. And when drivers do not maintain a common speed, collisions usually increase. Traffic flowing at a uniform speed results in increased safety and fewer collisions. Drivers are less impatient, pass less often, and tailgate less, which reduces both head-on and rear-end collisions.

The City of Spokane, by ordinance, has set basic speed limits, 25 mph for residential, 30 for arterials, unless otherwise posted. These speed limits are called *prima facie* limits, which are considered by law to be safe and prudent under normal conditions.

Posted speeds, different from those *prima facie* speeds, may be established by the City Council. The City conducts a speed study when the designated speed appears to be unreasonable. These studies include an analysis of roadway conditions, collision records, and a sampling of the prevailing speed of traffic. When the City Council is satisfied that a change in the posted speed limit will actually achieve the intended results of safer roads, the change is then authorized.

## What about people speeding on residential streets?

Residential speeding is a major community concern. Speeding has become a way of life for many; although residents may pass their own property within the speed limit, they have no hesitation zipping past their neighbors' property as fast as possible.

New stop signs are often requested to help reduce speeding, particularly in residential neighborhoods. But stop signs are not really effective for this purpose for several reasons. When new stop signs are installed, overall speeds often increase because drivers tend to accelerate more rapidly after a stop and drive faster to make up for the lost time caused by the unwarranted stop sign. Stop signs create an expectation in drivers and pedestrians that all drivers will stop at



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them. In fact many drivers, either purposely or inadvertently, roll through improperly established stop signs. The result can be an increase in serious collisions.

Speed bumps are another frequently requested speed control measure. However, because they are a hazard to emergency service vehicles, cyclists and some vehicles, and difficult to perform street maintenance such as sweeping and plowing, the bumps are not allowed on public roads within the City of Spokane.

### **What can be done to control speeding?**

Controlling speeding is very difficult. Realistically, almost all of us speed, at least occasionally. There is no effective way to make people drive slowly without constant enforcement. However, law enforcement is not the only solution to the problem since the City does not have, and indeed, could not afford a police force adequate to lie in wait for speeders in all residential areas. Nor can the problem be solved by engineering, for it is a "people problem", one that can only be solved by exerting sufficient social pressure on the offenders. Perhaps slowing the pace of modern life might help alleviate the problem. All too often the speeder is you or your neighbor hurrying to get to work or trying to make up for lost time in some personal or traffic related delay.

### **What is the City of Spokane doing?**

The Traffic Operations Division can promote safety through careful street design, proper signalization, signing and striping, and safe roadway construction and maintenance, but the ultimate burden of safety rests with you, the driver. We can do the engineering, while driving safely and allowing time to reach your destination without speeding is your responsibility.

The City of Spokane Public Works and Police Departments work with schools, neighborhood groups, and community organizations to reduce speeding, particularly in school zones. Some of these efforts include:

- Traffic Studies - The City's Traffic Operations Division conducts traffic studies to determine the location and severity of the problem and identify possible solutions.
- Enforcement - When one of our traffic studies verifies that speeds are substantially above the posted and reasonable speed, the Police Department is notified of the results. This helps them focus their limited resources in areas most in need.

Officers always place a special emphasis on the enforcement of school zones. Surprisingly most tickets are issued to parents and even teachers going to or from the school. Also when



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manpower and time allows, the Police Department responds to citizen concerns about neighborhood speed problems.

If you have any questions about Speed Zones, please contact the City of Spokane, Traffic Operations Division at (509) 232-8800. If you wish to report a potential speeding problem area, please call the Spokane Police Department at (509) 625-4150.