

"Children at Play"

Question:

Wouldn't a "Children at Play" sign help protect our children?

Answer:

We often get requests from parents for "Children at Play" signs to be installed in their neighborhoods. Parents hope that the signs will encourage drivers to slow down and drive cautiously. The concern for the safety of our children is important and that concern is shared by the Hamilton County Highway Department. Unfortunately, "Children at Play" signs may not be the best solution. Here's why:

Placing signs does not slow vehicles

The speeds people choose to drive along a roadway are generally determined by the roadway characteristics and environment and by the level of comfort and safety the driver perceives. In many cases, "Children at Play" or "Playground" (i.e., a sign with children on a teeter-totter) signs are placed along local neighborhood roadways; the users of these roadways are local residents and typically are aware of children in the neighborhood. The characteristics and environment of many local residential roadways also usually produce relatively low speeds. In this type of environment, a reduction in general vehicle speeds through the placement of a "Children at Play" or "Playground" sign should not be expected (especially when the hazard is not consistently clear to the driver).

Signs are used to warn of consistent, not occasional, conditions

Warning signs are effective when they warn drivers of consistent conditions. Because children are not likely to be consistently playing at a particular location in the neighborhood (unlike at playgrounds or parks), "Children at Play" signs placed there could lose their effectiveness. Studies have shown that when signs are overused or indicate conditions that are not likely and consistent, drivers start ignoring the signs.

With or without signs, education and awareness can be important

Even when "Children at Play" signs are used, it may not be a good to let your guard down or be lulled into a false sense of safety. Children can benefit from keeping in mind that the street is not a place to play and that not all drivers are necessarily watching out for them.