

6 Safety Signs

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Introduction

1. Safety signs are used as one of a variety of methods of communicating health and safety information. Safety signs are not a substitute for other means of controlling risks to employees. Their use must be considered as part of the hierarchy of risk control in Schedule 1 of the Management Regulations¹ and shall be used where applicable in all MOD sites or capabilities world-wide. Safety signs are to warn of any remaining significant risk or to instruct personnel of the measures they must take in relation to these risks.

2. Signs are designed to allow recognition of significant risks by Defence and contractor personnel through combination of shape, colour or pictogram and may be accompanied by supplementary text. Where the occasion requires, hand signals or spoken messages are to be used to guide people carrying out hazardous or dangerous manoeuvres – hand signals or spoken messages shall only be carried out by trained and competent persons i.e. Banksman or Signaller. A competent person will be qualified, current, experienced and mature in the activity.

3. Signs and labels used in connection with the supply of substances, products and equipment or the transport of dangerous goods are not covered in this chapter; these requirements are covered in the relevant leaflets or specific Joint Service Publications (JSPs) - see Section 6 - Related Documents. More detailed information on the usage of health and safety signage can be found in the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations.

Roles and Responsibilities

Commanding Officers (COs) / Heads of Establishment (HoE)

4. COs / HoE are to ensure adequate and visible signage is provided to inform or warn all personnel and visitors of significant risks throughout the site.

¹ Management H&S Regulation 1999 (SI 3242-1999)

Managers

5. Managers must take into account the risk assessment (JSP 375 Volume 1 Chapter 8) conducted on the hazard itself when determining the need to display safety signs. Where a significant risk remains following implementation of control measures, appropriate safety signs must be displayed in a prominent location and in accordance with the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations, where they apply.

6. Where a safety sign would not help to reduce the risk, or where the risk is not significant, there is no need to provide a sign. Managers must ensure that all safety signs are properly maintained, not obstructed from view, and that all personnel receive suitable and adequate information, instruction and training in the meaning of safety signs and the measures to be taken in connection with them. Although most safety signs are self-explanatory, personnel and visitors, including contractors (particularly new ones) may be unfamiliar with the meaning of some of the less commonly used signs. It is therefore important that the meaning of any unfamiliar sign is clearly explained, and that personnel and visitors are aware of the consequences of not following the warning or instruction given by the sign.

All Personnel

7. All personnel must ensure that they understand the meanings of safety signs and comply with the instruction; e.g. compliance with a prohibition or mandatory safety sign. Personnel or visitors who are unfamiliar with the meaning of the sign, they should first ask their manager for an explanation, rather than proceed at risk.

8. All personnel should bring to their manager's attention any concerns that they may have about any workplace health and safety issues; e.g. damaged, missing or obscured signage.

Sign Format and Placement

9. Safety signs have specific meanings dependent on their shape and colour. Table 1 shows examples of the acceptable format for safety signs.

Meaning or purpose	Colour	Shape	Instruction and information	Example
Prohibition sign	Black pictogram on a white background with red edging and diagonal line.	Round	Must not do; specific instruction e.g. No access for unauthorised persons.	
Warning sign	Black pictogram on a yellow or amber background with black edging.	Triangle	Be careful; take precautions e.g. trip hazard.	

Meaning or purpose	Colour	Shape	Instruction and information	Example
Mandatory sign	White pictogram on a blue background	Round	Must do; specific behaviour or action, e.g. wear personal protective equipment.	
Safe condition	White pictogram on a green background.	Rectangle or square	Identifies a safe route; location of safety equipment; safe condition e.g. escape routes; first aid equipment.	
Fire Safety	White pictogram on a red background	Rectangle or square	Fire fighting equipment or facilities	

Table 1: Example Format for Signs

10. Pictograms should be used in preference to text, to simplify understanding.
11. It may sometimes be useful to supplement a safety sign with text to aid understanding. For example, when introducing a new or unfamiliar sign or using a general danger or warning sign. Where additional text is added to a sign, the background colour to this text is the same colour as the background of the sign it is supplementing (figure 1).



figure 1.

12. In compliance with the MOD Welsh Language Scheme, safety signs which contain text displayed on MOD sites in Wales shall be provided in both Welsh and English versions. Alternatively, bilingual versions may be used.
13. It may be necessary to consider displaying text in other languages where the use of English may not be a first language or easily understood.

14. The size of pictograms and text should be sufficient to allow easy recognition at normal working distances. Table 2 provides guidance on minimum text sizes; however, sizes may need to be increased to ensure readability e.g. where employees have visual impairments.

Viewing distance (mm)	Height in mm
501-900	5
901-1800	9
1801-3600	18
3601-6000	30

Or if the viewing distance exceeds in 6000 mm use the formula: Height in mm = Viewing distance in mm/200

Table 2: Information extracted from HSE guidance for COMAH sites

15. Care should also be taken to ensure the intended audience are not overwhelmed by too many signs, which can result in sign or sign cluster blindness. If you have several signs covering a common risk control such as use of protective work wear, consider consolidating them on to a single sign. Over familiarity or sign blindness can occur when a worker sees a sign every day, and because they are so familiar with the sign they choose to ignore its message should also be considered, this can be mitigated with regular verbal reinforcement of the sign’s message and within reason changing the position of the signage.

16. Signage may also be used to mark obstacles, dangerous locations and traffic routes. Highlighting the edge of a raised platform or area where objects may fall using markings consisting of continuous yellow and black, or red and white stripes as shown in figure 2.



figure 2.

17. Signboards are to be made of shock and weather-resistant material. Installation should be at a suitable height and in a position appropriate to the line of sight, in a well-lit and easily accessible and visible location, either at the access point to an area in the case of a general hazard or in the immediate vicinity of a specific hazard. Phosphorescent colours, reflective materials or artificial lighting should be used where natural light is poor. A signboard must be removed when the situation to which it refers ceases to exist and any plans updated to reflect.

18. A guaranteed supply of power or back-up in the event of failure may be necessary for safety signs and signals which require some form of power to enable them to operate (unless the hazard is itself eliminated by the power failure).

Purchase of Signs

19. The preferred method of obtaining safety signs is through the central enabling contract (managed by Defence Equipment & Support) which can provide both standard and bespoke signage.

20. For NATO Codified Items, Army and Navy demanders should go through the normal channels i.e. SCOC at Bicester for the Army; and issue control at Naval bases for the Navy.

21. Local purchase of safety signs may be considered where a delay in supply creates an unacceptable risk and they meet the standards.

Related Documents

22. The following documents should be consulted in conjunction with this chapter:

- a. JSP 375 Volume 1;
 - (1) Chapter 8 - Risk Assessment;
 - (2) Chapter 9 - Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres;
 - (3) Chapter 11 - Substances Hazardous to Health; and
 - (4) Chapter 25 - Control of Noise at Work.
- b. Other MOD Publications;
 - (1) JSP 392 - Radiation Safety Handbook Vol 2 Leaflet 4;
 - (2) DSA02-DLSR Defence Movements and Transport Regulations;
 - (3) Def Stan 02-784 - Requirements for Safety Signs and Colours;
 - (4) DSA01.1 – Defence Policy for Health, Safety and Environmental Protection; and
 - (5) DSA01.2 Chapter 2 – Requirement for Safety and Environmental Management Systems in Defence.
- c. Legislation and Guidance;
 - (1) [Health and Safety \(Safety Signs and Signals\) Regulations;](#)
 - (2) [Safety Signs and Signals – HSE guidance L64.](#)

- d. British Standards – these can be accessed via the Dstan site²
- (1) BS-EN-ISO-7010:2020 Safety Signs and colours (incl. Fire).
NB: Additional safety signs are required under ADR, IMO, ICAO derived legislation or related Defence Regulations;
 - (2) BS ISO 3864-1:2011 Graphical symbols. Safety colours and safety signs. Design principles for safety signs and safety markings;
 - (3) BS ISO 3864-3:2012 Graphical symbols. Safety colours and safety signs. Design principles for graphical symbols for use in safety signs;
 - (4) BS ISO 3864-4:2011 Graphical symbols — Safety colours and safety signs — Part 4: Colorimetric and photometric properties of safety sign materials;
 - (5) BS 5499-4:2013 Safety signs. Code of practice for escape route signing; and
 - (6) BS 5499-10:2014 Guidance for the selection and use of safety signs and fire safety notices.

² Access to British Standards is via the Dstan site: <http://dstan.uwh.diiif.r.mil.uk/sol/index.htm>