



DETERMINING THE SAFE SPEED FOR CURVES

As a vehicle approaches a curve, the driver will hopefully slow down and negotiate the curve safely. This is possible because signs have been placed by the highway department informing the traveling public of the character of the curve. In order to do this successfully, one needs to know which signs should be used, and how to properly place them.

Before discussing how to determine which sign to use, one needs to remember what the curve and turn signs are telling the traveling public. Black-on-yellow signs are **warning signs**. These particular ones provide information to the motorists about the nature of the curve they are approaching. They let the driver know if it is a sharp turn or just a gradual curve. Supplemental plates provide an advisory speed for traveling around the curve.



What Does the Advisory Speed Mean?

The advisory speed for a curve is **NOT** the safe speed for every vehicle and pavement condition. The advisory speed is a relative value that, for most vehicles, under **WET** pavement conditions, provides an adequate margin of safety and is reasonably comfortable for most drivers. On a snowy day, for example, one may need to drive even slower than the advisory speed.

It is important to have a consistent, uniform method of placing curve signs. If every curve is posted consistently, the traveling public will have a better understanding of how to drive when they see a particular sign. On the other hand, if some curves are posted differently, the driver may not know what the sign means. Uniformity may be the most important aspect of all signage, not just curve signs, i.e. the Manual on *Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.

Determining Which Signs to Place

The choice of which specific sign to place on a curve depends upon several different factors. The number of curves in a series, the advisory speed of the sharpest corner, and the alignment of the first curve all help to determine which sign to place. When deciding whether to group curves as part of a series, determine if they have the same alignment (for example, two curves to the left or two to the right). If two curves have the same alignment and are separated by more than 200 feet of straightaway, sign them separately. If two curves have opposite alignments (for example, one to the left and then one to the right) and the distance between them is less than 600 feet, group them together. Sequential curves can always be signed separately if needed, just be sure that the sign placement is not confusing to motorists.

If the advisory speed is less than or equal to 20 mph, place turn signs (W1-1 and W1-3). At 35 mph or more, use curve signs (W1-2 and W1-4). At speeds of 25 and 30 mph, either type of sign may be used. The determination of which sign to use should be based upon a study of the geometry and general appearance of the curve(s). A W1-5 is used whenever there are three or more curves in a series. If there are more than four curves in a row, additional signs are warranted in the middle of the series. An L (left) and R (right) designation is used to define the direction/orientation of the first turn.

The goal is to provide a consistent message to alert drivers to the nature of the roadway they are about to travel.

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