
ACCESSING SAFETY KNOWLEDGE (ASK) SHEET

IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY SIGNS: WHAT SHOULD WE KNOW

Construction sites are dangerous areas, and not just for trespassers who find themselves knowingly wandering into one. Accidents can happen even when we take every precaution we know of to prevent them. However, there are ways to remind both workers, and even possible trespassers, of hazardous conditions and ways to protect themselves from injury. Posting safety signs in the area is one of those ways.

A properly placed safety sign can go a long way to protecting the lives of those who work at construction sites by alerting individuals of possible hazards and the precautionary measures they need to take. Construction safety signs prevent injuries and save lives. We need to constantly be reminded of things so we don't forget them, and construction site safety signs are an easy way to do that. One of the biggest tasks faced in ensuring good health and safety practice is the communication of information. It is vital that everyone concerned understands risks and how they should be dealt with. For this reason, the proper signage in a workplace is essential, as it is one of the main points of reference and contact for staff. These signs should be found anywhere in which a potential hazard might be found, and the aim is to clearly indicate the danger so that it may be avoided. Other signs actually explain the precautions to take in order to avoid the hazard.

There are a great number of different signs in existence – many may only be found once in a specific location, but they are all important. These signs can convey a variety of meanings, because in many cases, the simple warning of danger is not adequate. The very best health and safety systems use a complete set of signs that not only help to prevent dangerous situations, but instruct workers in how to deal with them. For instance, a hazardous gas sign may be accompanied by an instruction to wear a gas mask. This is more effective than a lone warning symbol, which would not explain how to avoid the potential hazard. This is not to say that signs should be solely relied on; there is no substitute for a properly trained workforce. Instead, the signs should serve as a reminder, and be of use to those who aren't necessarily familiar with an area or process. For this reason, it is critical that safety signs are easy to understand. Simple graphics or words work far better than complex instruction in allowing a person to make an immediate decision. Many are typically recognizable, such as the red circular prohibition sign, but others might need to be more specific depending on the situation.

There are four main types of safety signage used in the workplace, and generally they use the same color schemes all over the world.

- **Red** is an indication of the potential of immediate danger, which means action must be taken, or in fact something is prohibited.
- **Yellow** or amber is a warning that precautionary steps should be taken to ensure safety.
- **Blue** is a mandatory instruction that often accompanies danger or warning signs to ensure safety.
- **Green** is a safety sign, but does not mean any kind of danger; instead it is used to indicate an escape route or first aid.

A place of work which has an effective health and safety system is likely to use all of these types of signs. Having the proper signage in your place of work can significantly reduce accidents. OSHA has legislation in place that means signs are legally required. Compliance is therefore mandatory and both beneficial and essential.

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