

DID YOU KNOW???

“CHILDREN AT PLAY” SIGNS UNNECESSARY EXPENSE

About a year ago a “Did You Know” article discussed the need for any highway sign to meet the following five criteria; fulfill a need, command attention, command respect, have one simple message, and give adequate time for proper driver response. The proliferation of “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs in Franklin County does none of these. Parents requesting this sign of their municipality erroneously think that erecting these signs on both sides of a highway prior to their house will slow drivers down, giving a safer environment for their children to play in their front yard.

However, there is no evidence that special warning signs of this sort reduce driver speeds or crash rates. In fact, these signs do not give clear and enforceable guidance to drivers. They provide a false sense of security to parents and children that may increase risk, expose the government to liability, give the false impression that areas without such signs do not have children, represent an unnecessary expense to the local government that then propagates as additional signs are requested, and violates the principle that signage should be based on engineering, not political, decision making.

Although the CHILDREN AT PLAY sign can still be found in the NYS Supplement, it is no longer in the National Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Studies have found that overuse of this sign, as is evident by the hundreds of them in Franklin County, causes drivers to develop insensitivity to the sign’s intended goal. Placing an old “big wheel” near the road edge during children play times, removing it when no children are playing, may yield better results. The CHILDREN AT PLAY sign may even be construed that it is acceptable for children to play in the street, and thus, by producing a false sense of security, be counterproductive.

Signs lose credibility with motorists when they appear too often. Instead of being extra diligent, drivers tend to ignore the signs, especially if no children are observed playing, which is most of the time.

Another problem with villages and towns erecting these signs is that they rarely are taken down after the children have grown up or moved away. Take a look at the picture of the sign accompanying this article. Just how old do you think the children are that originally caused the sign to be installed? They likely have grandchildren of their own by now.

In conclusion, CHILDREN AT PLAY signs *should not* be used unless there is a justifiable cause to do so. A house with children on any road in and of itself is not a justifiable cause to install such signs.

For more articles on traffic law and safety, go to the traffic safety board’s web site at: www.franklincony.org and click on “Traffic Safety Board” under departments then look for Did You Know articles under “services”. You may also email me at: dwerner151@verizon.net

