

DID YOU KNOW???

SCHOOL SPEED LIMITS MUST MEET REQUIREMENTS

Now that school has resumed for another school year, reduced speed limits in the vicinity of schools during certain times are in effect. Have you ever wondered just what criteria are involved in creating school speed limits? Read on.

A school speed limit does not guarantee lower operating speeds. School speed limits should be established only if the following conditions exist:

- The school has one or more grades below grade 12
- Some of the children walk or bike to school

Where a school speed limit is established and if students must cross a street or highway at the school, the following conditions should also be met:

- The school speed limit zone contains a marked crosswalk
- The crosswalk is supervised
- There is no nearby traffic control signal, pedestrian overpass or underpass, or bridge suitable for pedestrian use

In Franklin County, school speed limits may be established only with approval from the NYS DOT. The numerical value of the speed limit should be 10 mph below the posted speed limit but by law not less than 15 mph. NYS Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL) also specifies that the maximum length of a school speed limit zone shall not exceed 1320 feet (1/4 mile). School speed limits are allowed on school days during times from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m., or during alternative times within such hours, such as 7-9 a.m. and 2-4 p.m. Although many of our school speed limit zones on local streets do not designate the times, this designation is required on the signs regulating the reduced speed limits. A sign noting the end of the school speed limit is also required, although again, many of our school speed limit zones lack these signs as well. Warning signs associated with school buses and schools shall have a fluorescent yellow-green background.

The beginning of a school speed limit zone should be at a point 300 feet from the school property line or 200 feet from the first crosswalk, whichever is encountered first by traffic. The signs for the reduced speed limit should be placed at these points.

NYS also allows for the installation of flashing yellow beacons attached to the school speed limit signs. When this is the case, the school speed limit is in effect only when the beacons are flashing, and signs so noting accompany the beacons. Normally schools flash the beacons only during times students are going to school in the morning and leaving schools in the afternoon. However, the beacons are allowed to be flashed during school events at times outside of the 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. period, such as for a school sports event at night but only from 1/2 before the event until 1/2 hour after its conclusion. This type of signage can be effective, but only if the beacons flash when student activities are taking place. If they are operated during times when no student activities are taking place, they lose credibility with motorists.

Thus, it is evident that school speed limits, when properly installed, are strongly controlled by the national Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and the NYS Supplement to the national manual. They are not arbitrary, and in fact, must include an engineering study to verify the need. School speed limits are for the protection of our children; when driving through them compliance should be foremost in your mind.