

'Hot Topics' provide basic guidance on common workplace Health & Safety requirements. They use a simple 'Q&A' approach to convey key messages, but are not intended as an authoritative interpretation of every aspect of the applicable Health & Safety legislation.

Hot Topic 01: Safety signs (v01, 01-Apr14)

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1. What is a 'safety sign'?

A 'safety sign', more correctly known as a signboard, provides information or instruction on workplace Health & Safety by the use of geometric shape, colour and pictorial symbol.

2. Is there any law that covers safety signs?

Yes. Safety signs are subject to the requirements of the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996 and further guidance is contained in its supporting approved code of practice, L64.

3. What are the different categories of safety signs?

There are four main categories, as follows:

- prohibition signs;
- warning signs;
- mandatory signs; and
- emergency escape or first-aid signs.

4. What does each type of safety sign look like?

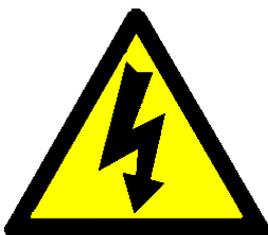
A 'prohibition sign' is circular in shape with a black pictogram on a white background and a red border and diagonal line.

This safety sign prohibits smoking.



A 'warning sign' is triangular with a black pictogram on a yellow background with a black border.

This safety sign warns of an electrical hazard.



Note: A general warning sign has an exclamation mark, and is usually accompanied by supplementary information board to explain its purpose.

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A 'mandatory sign' is circular in shape with a white pictogram on a blue background and a white border.

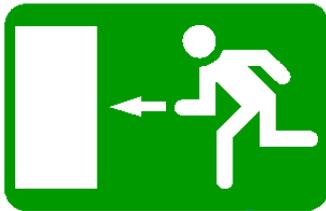
This safety sign means the wearing of eye protection, i.e. safety glasses, is mandatory.



Note: A general mandatory sign has an exclamation mark, and is usually accompanied by a supplementary information board to explain its purpose.

Emergency escape and first-aid signs are square or rectangular with a white pictogram on a green background and a white border.

This safety sign indicates the direction of an emergency escape route leading to a fire exit.



There is a further category of sign that can be used to provide information on fire-fighting equipment. These signs are similar to other emergency and first-aid signs but have a red, not green, background.

This fire safety sign is used to show the location of a fire hose reel.



5. Do safety signs need to have explanatory words?

No. However, the use of an additional information board with explanatory words can help clarify the reason for the safety sign being present.

For example, an information board may be used to explain the specific type of protection that must be worn when a mandatory eye or hearing protection safety sign is used.

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6. Do safety signs have to be of a particular size, layout and colour?

Yes. Safety signs must comply with a relevant British Standard that specifies the ratio of the sign dimensions, the colours that can be used and the percentage of the sign allowed for the pictogram and border.

In addition, safety signs can be provided as illuminated signs, as long as they comply with the relevant British Standard.

7. Where should safety signs be displayed?

In simple terms, safety signs should be placed anywhere where information is required for the purpose of ensuring workplace Health & Safety!

Normally, the need to display a safety sign would follow on from a workplace risk assessment where a hazard or risk is identified and there is a need to convey Health & Safety information.

For example:

- a warning sign could be used where a risk to Health & Safety cannot be avoided; or
- a prohibition sign used to stop a work activity that would give rise to a significant risk; or
- a mandatory sign to ensure that personal protective equipment, PPE, is used to reduce a risk to health.

The use of a safety sign would be recorded as a control measure in a risk assessment record.

Obviously, emergency escape, first-aid and fire-fighting signs should be placed at appropriate locations throughout the premises to identify emergency escape routes and the location of first-aid and fire-fighting equipment.

8. Where can I find out more about safety signs?

The Health and Safety Executive, HSE, has published a leaflet, 'Signpost to the Safety Signs and Safety Signals Regulations 1996', IND(G)184, that provides further guidance on safety signs in the workplace.

A copy of the leaflet can be downloaded free from HSE's website.