STOP AND YIELD SIGNS

We would like to give you an idea of the engineering knowledge and experience which your Street Department must consider when evaluating the need for traffic control measures. Arriving at the best solution for each situation calls for judgment combined with engineering knowledge and experience.

What are the official guidelines?
The Department follows Agency policies and the Revised Code of Washington (RCW or State Law). The RCW's require us to follow the national guidelines outlined in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Traffic control devices include signal lights, traffic signs, and paint markings. The MUTCD covers all aspects of the placement, construction and maintenance of every form of approved traffic control. The guidelines prescribe five basic requirements of all devices. They must: fulfill a need, command attention, convey a clear simple meaning, command respect of road users, and give adequate time for proper response. The MUTCD emphasizes "uniformity" of traffic control devices. A uniform device conforms to the regulations for dimensions, color, wording and graphics. The standard device should convey the same meaning at all times. Consistent use of traffic control devices protects the clarity of their messages. As stated in the MUTCD, "uniformity" must also mean treating similar situations in the same way.

When are stop and yield signs used?
The literal message of a stop sign is clear and uncomplicated. The intent behind a stop sign is to assign and control right-of-way. Yield signs are typically installed at intersections that do not necessarily require approaching vehicles to come to a full stop if conflicting traffic is not present. Both assigns are considered at locations where prevailing traffic volumes and reported accident history make assignment of right-of-way desirable. As simple as it might appear on the surface, the decision to install these signs require careful consideration of engineering criteria.

What are the drawbacks to these signs?
National guidelines dictate that stop and yield signs should not be installed as any attempt to reduce speeding problems. When misused, the stop sign can create an inconvenient and even dangerous situation for motorists and pedestrians. Drivers are more likely to intentionally violate an unwarranted sign. Research has also revealed that motorists often increase their driving speeds between intersections in an attempt to make up for lost time.

What are the specific criteria for installing these signs?
To determine whether stop or yield signs would be the best and most appropriate measure of traffic control; traffic engineers analyze the various characteristics of an intersection. Some of the questions they ask themselves include: Is this an intersection of a less important road with a main road where application of the normal right-or-way rule is unduly hazardous? Is this an intersection where a street enters an arterial? Is this an intersection where a combination of speed, restricted view and reported accident history indicates a need for control by the stop sign?

What other measures could be available?
When a request for a stop sign is received, many times the resulting review shows that there are other traffic control measures which may be available to address the concerns. Improving intersection visibility and sight distance or using less restrictive signing can make installation of stop signs unnecessary.

The MUTCD outlines a set of warrants or standards against which all intersections can be evaluated. By applying consistent criteria to all intersections, we are able to insure uniformity of sign placement. Maintaining uniformity helps to preserve the expectation of drivers that all stop signs are important and should command their attention and respect.