

TAP IT!

Technical Assistance Program, Information Transfer
KY Local Technical Assistance Program

Introduction to the MUTCD

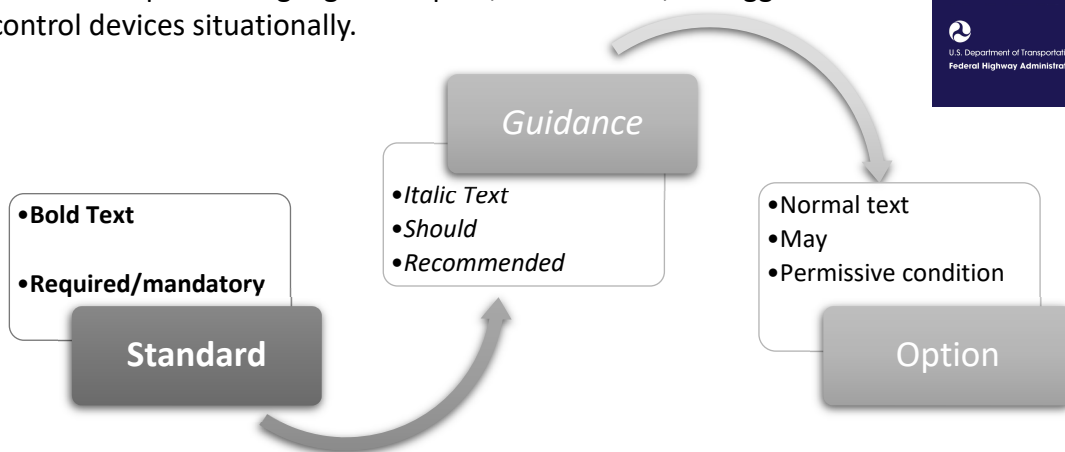
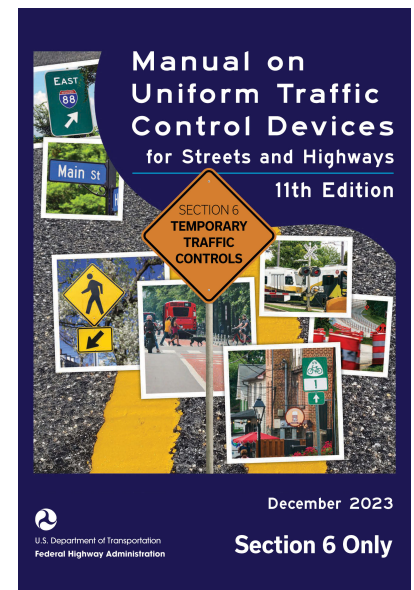
“The purpose of traffic control devices is to promote highway safety and efficiency by providing for the orderly movement of all road users on streets and highways throughout the Nation.”

Introduction to the MUTCD

The [Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices](#), or MUTCD, is published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).¹ It contains all national design, application, and placement standards for traffic control devices ranging from signs and markings, to traffic signals, temporary work zone practices, to railroad and school zone requirements. The consistent and uniform guidance provided in the MUTCD results in safer roadways across the country. **Guidance in the MUTCD applies to ALL streets, highways, pedestrian facilities, bikeways, or private roads open to public travel.**

Regulatory Language

The MUTCD uses specific language to require, recommend, or suggest traffic control devices situationally.



When the MUTCD identifies a “shall” condition, this represents a ministerial duty to meet the requirement by the responsible agency.

When an action is identified as a “should” condition, a justification or engineering study is usually required to deviate from the requirement. When deviating from a should condition, an agency must DOCUMENT the conditions and reasons that led to the decision.

May conditions are options and do are not legal requirements; however, agencies should check local and state guidance which may identify optional practices as should or shall conditions.

Roadway Signing

One of the most common applications of the MUTCD is guidance provided for roadway signing. Three basic types of signs, Regulatory, Warning, and Guide, are identified in the manual and discussed below.

Regulatory Signs indicate applicability of legal requirements such as traffic laws or regulations and shall be installed where regulations apply. These signs typically have black lettering on a white background, but critical signs such as stop, and yield control utilize white lettering on a red background.



Warning Signs provide notice to driver of unexpected conditions and frequently designate the need to reduce speed. Warning signs utilize black lettering on yellow background and are typically diamond shaped. However, special shapes are used to designate some special conditions, such as school crossings. Warning signs frequently designate the need to reduce speed.

Guide Signs provide travel assistance information to drivers. These signs show route designations, destinations, directions, distances, services, points of interest, and other information. The most common type of guide sign is the street name sign. Guide signs utilize white lettering on a green background but may also utilize white on blue to indicate services or white on brown to indicate recreational areas.



Additional Information

As indicated, the MUTCD is comprised of 9 parts. These nine parts and their focus are identified below. The full MUTCD is available at <https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>.

Parts of the MUTCD

PART 1. GENERAL

PART 2. SIGNS

PART 3. MARKINGS

PART 4. HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SIGNALS

PART 5. TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICES FOR LOW-VOLUME ROADS

PART 6. TEMPORARY TRAFFIC CONTROL

PART 7. TRAFFIC CONTROL FOR SCHOOL AREAS

PART 8. TRAFFIC CONTROL FOR RAILROAD AND LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT GRADE CROSSINGS

PART 9. TRAFFIC CONTROL FOR BICYCLE FACILITIES

1. Manual on Traffic Control Devices, Federal Highway Administration. 2009. <https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>