

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of December 2, 2013 – OSHA's New Rules for Signs and Tags

In September, OSHA issued a direct final rule revising requirements for workplace safety signs. The goal of the new rule is to create a single, national uniform system of hazard recognition. OSHA believes that such consistency will create more effective communication, which in turn, should help achieve the objective of fewer workplace accidents. This final rule updates the original OSHA workplace safety sign and tag formats (from 1971) by including today's best practice safety signage designs as defined by the latest American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z535 standards.

ANSI is not a regulatory agency; rather, it is a private non-profit organization that oversees the development of voluntary consensus standards (i.e. a standard that is not mandatory to meet compliance, but has been developed through a consensus of subject-matter experts for products, services, processes, systems, and personnel) ANSI also coordinates U.S. standards with international standards so that American products can be used worldwide. For example, one specific ANSI standard ensures that people who own cameras can find the film they need for that camera anywhere around the globe.

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The specific revised ANSI Standards that OSHA shall now reference into their regulations are:

- ANSI Z535.1 - Safety Colors - Provides color standards and tolerances as well as technical definitions
- ANSI Z535.2-2011 - Environmental and facility safety signs - Describes the five types of safety signs used in facilities and outlines their use for consistent reinforcement and prevention of injury
- ANSI Z535.3-2011 - Criteria for safety symbols - Lists criteria for use of safety symbols to identify specific hazards and help people avoid injury.
- ANSI Z535.4-2011 - Product safety signs and labels Sets design criteria for use of safety signs on products
- ANSI Z535.5-2011 - Safety tags and barricade tapes (for temporary hazards) - Provides design, application and use criteria for barricade tape, tags and other means of identifying temporary hazards.
- ANSI Z535.6-2011 - Product safety information in product manuals, instructions, and other collateral materials - Provides information for providing clear, effective safety instructions such as owner's manuals, assembly instructions, user guides and maintenance instructions

The new requirements shall be incorporated into OSHA regulations through references within the various general industry and constructions standards. For instance, OSHA’s standard for “Specifications for Accident Prevention Signs and Tags,” can be found in 29 CFR 1910.145, where in the past, the predecessor to ANSI Z535.1 – ANSI 53, was referenced. Now ANSI Z535 will be the referenced document. This is similar to looking up the OSHA regulation for safety glasses, where the OSHA regulation, 29 CFR 1910.133, *Eye and Face Protection*, references ANSI Z87 as the criterion that the performance of safety glasses shall meet.

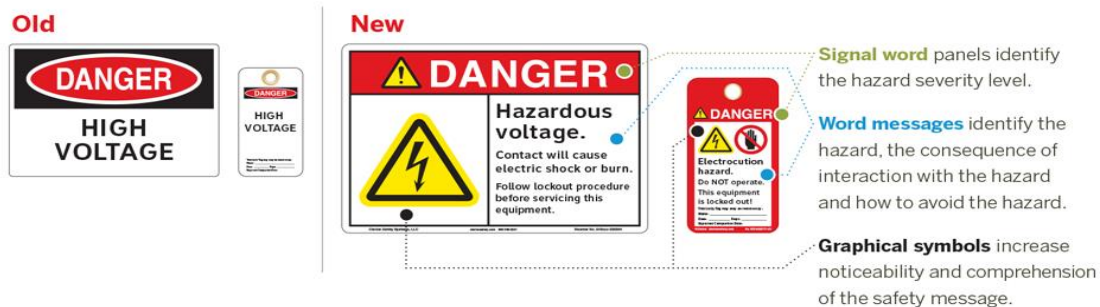
These latest changes for signs and tags are designed to:

- Provide the information employees need to make safe decisions
- Emphasize legibility, hazard avoidance, and hazard consequences
- Make use of research on effective warnings and modern risk assessment methodologies
- Communicate safety to non-English speaking workers with multiple languages and graphical symbol panels
- Meet current legal criteria for "adequate warnings"

One of the reasons for the new signage requirements is growing cultural diversity in the United States. As the population becomes more diverse, there has been a rise in non-native English speakers, which makes communication more challenging. Another concern is literacy. Studies show that 30 million adults in the United States cannot read, while 14% read at or below a 5th grade level and 29 % read at the 8th grade level.

The new safety sign designs are intended to assist workers that fall within the above categories, as to make it easier for this group to recognize the symbol or the simple signal word and avoid the hazard. Under federal law employers are required to provide information to employees about health and safety at the workplace in a manner the employee understands. As such, the ANSI Z535 series signage addresses this concern with appropriate symbols and signal words identifying the potential hazard and how to avoid the hazard. These safety signs need to be 1) clear and consistent, 2) have standard symbols that convey the intended message, and 3) use simple, everyday language and signal words.

Below is an example of how the design of signage has changed. Obvious visual illustrations and more specific hazard identification are illustrated.



The OSHA signage change provides employers with options for meeting the design criteria requirements for safety signage. To avoid imposing additional costs on facility owners, the ANSI

Z535-2011 references will appear next to the older ANSI Z35-1968 standards in OSHA's regulations. Employers will be able to continue to use the same signs and tags they are using now to meet their OSHA compliance obligations and to use the updated designs to improve workplace safety.

Safety is something that happens between your ears, not something you hold in your hands.

Jeff Cooper (Founder of the American Pistol Institute)