

Tech Topic

Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)

The MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices) is a Federal Highway Administration manual, consisting of standards for the installation and maintenance of Traffic Control Devices (TCDs). The MUTCD regulates signage, pavement markings, highway traffic signals, traffic control devices for low volume roads, temporary traffic control (work zones), traffic controls for school areas, traffic controls for highway-rail grade crossings, traffic controls for bicycle facilities, and traffic control for highway-light transit grade crossings.

Stemming from the federal MUTCD, Delaware also has a state-wide MUTCD (Delaware Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices) that is a set of mandatory regulations for all state owned roads. The federal MUTCD is applicable to all public roadways, regardless of ownership:

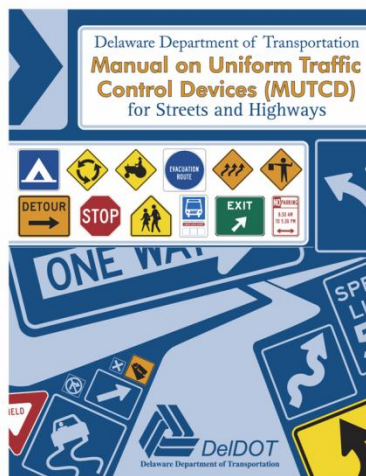
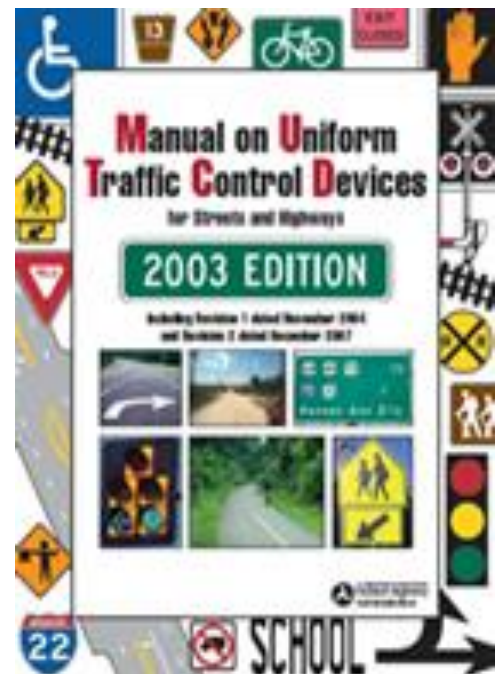
“The responsibility for the design, placement, operation, maintenance, and uniformity of traffic control devices shall rest with the public agency or the official having jurisdiction. 23 CFR 655.603 adopts the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices as the national standard for all traffic control devices installed on any street, highway, or bicycle trail open to public travel. When a State or other Federal agency manual or supplement is required, that manual or supplement shall be in substantial conformance with the national Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. 23 CFR 655.603 also states that traffic control devices on all streets and highways open to public travel in each State shall be in substantial conformance with standards issued or endorsed by the Federal Highway Administrator.” (federal MUTCD, Section 1A.07)

Specific to signs, the MUTCD addresses every conceivable aspect, including the design, location, placement, quality, and maintenance. Among other topics, it controls size, color, dimensions, words, symbols, borders,

location and roadside offsets, orientation, post designs, and maintenance requirements. A somewhat newer set of standards center on retroreflectivity (the ability, over time, of a sign to reflect a light source back at a vehicle at night); see the dedicated Tech Topic on this subject for further information.

Local governments often mistakenly imagine that the MUTCD does not apply to their roadways and/or they need not worry about its details. This is incorrect on several fronts:

- These same local agencies are responsible for local and visiting motorists and pedestrians, and the details within the MUTCD provide enhanced safety for these populations.



- Driver expectation is a significant factor in preventing crashes, and consistency in signage is an important element in driver expectancy.
- The MUTCD, by virtue of the language in Section 1A.07, is the law and local agencies are indeed bound by it.
- Civil (tort) liability lawsuits affect small jurisdictions as well as large ones and such a lawsuit, with or without apparent merit, can bring a large financial burden to a small town just in legal fees. Compliance with the MUTCD can often be an important element of an affirmative defense for such a defendant.

Suggested Further Reading and References:

- Federal Highway Administration MUTCD:
<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2003r1r2/mutcd2003r1r2complet.pdf>
- State of Delaware MUTCD:
http://www.deldot.gov/information/pubs_forms/manuals/de_mutcd/index.shtml



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