

With computers in every office and inexpensive software available that allows anyone to design and print signage, there's really no excuse not to have clean, legible safety signs throughout your workplace.

It has been quite a while since I discussed signs in this column, and there have been changes and updates since that time. You definitely want your signage to promote your image, but you also want it to meet OSHA requirements. Most importantly, however, we all want our signs to work. Beyond promoting our companies, the vast majority of our signage is safety related, and as much as we want our advertising signage to work for us, its value as a safety reminder is even more important. I believe that by reviewing our signage we can all make improvements that will benefit ourselves, our employees, and through them, the bottom line. Our safety signage can even work as a form of advertisement in that when customers visit they notice whether or not we are taking all possible steps to provide a safe environment for everyone in our plant, and if they are favorably impressed it adds to the ability to make that sale. Therefore, it really behooves us to make a periodic review of all of our safety signage for possible improvements. I would suggest that you first review the OSHA requirements at its Web site [www.osha.gov] to make sure that your signage meets all necessary requirements.


When reviewing existing signage there are a number of questions to ask, such as whether it presents a professional image. Also, does it cover the intended topic, while not being too wordy? The best signs are not too busy or crowded to easily understand, and they address the topic with a minimal amount of words. You don't want to make

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your signs be a chore to read. Instead you want them to be concise, to the point, and to present a message that will remain in the reader's mind. Is the lettering easy to see and read? Often, when we get too wordy or try to cover too broad a subject within such a small space, we reduce the font or size of the letters, which makes the sign harder to read—and, therefore, it's more likely that it won't get read at all. You will also want to check for very basic things, like whether your signs are in good shape and not tattered and smudged. I realize that everything gets dirty in a shop environment, and that signs can be hard to read because of this, but that will totally negate their value.

As for new signs, it is so easy in this day and age to print them from our own computers that there really is no good excuse for not having clean, new signs at all times. Today we can print messages on all types of materials, from normal 20-pound typewriter paper, to card stock, to clear self-adhesive

paper, to glossy photo paper and even fabric. Between this ability and the easy availability of signs to be downloaded off the Internet, we just do not have a viable excuse to neglect having good signage available in our manufacturing environments. It's also worth mentioning that, as long as you meet the minimum requirements for safety signage as outlined by OSHA, you can make your signs any color that you like. If you have specific company colors, for instance, you can use them to make the placard appear even more professional than some standard versions. It's also important to realize that your safety signage extends to any labels that you use on your products or shipments. And while you can make these labels appear however you wish, just remember to ask yourself the following questions: What will the sign be used for? Will it be a temporary sign, or will it be permanent? Will it be mounted inside or outside, and from how far away must it be legible? If you answer these questions prior to designing the sign you will find it much easier to make one that meets the image you want to project, while also achieving the desired goal of promoting safety in the workplace.

Another bit of information you may not be aware of is that, in the Nov. 15, 2007 Federal Register, OSHA announced their final ruling on PPE (personal protective equipment). The rule provides a policy that—with only a few exceptions—requires that all such equipment be provided by the employer, at no cost to the employees. To learn more go to [www.gpoaccess.gov/fr]. 

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