



# OSHA SIGNAGE

## QUICK START GUIDE

### Safety signs save lives

Visual communication delivers information instantly to workers. Effective safety signs:

- Protect workers & visitors
- Ensure OSHA/ANSI compliance
- Build positive safety culture

# DuraLabel®

### Importance of Safety Signs

This guide will help you evaluate your facility signage so you can improve safety and comply with OSHA regulations. Workers are often injured on the job when visual communication isn't used to warn them of workplace hazards:



**5,486**  
work-related  
fatalities in 2022

**2,800,000**  
nonfatal injuries and illnesses  
in 2022



### Danger Zone

Safety can be cited by OSHA as violating regulatory requirements. Citations often carry heavy fines:

- **\$16,131** per violation (most violations)
- **\$161,323** per violation (willful/repeated)

OSHA's maximum penalties are adjusted annually; the current maximum penalty amounts can be found at [osha.gov/penalties](https://www.osha.gov/penalties).

The **Hierarchy of Controls** is a common approach for improving workplace safety. It begins with eliminating the hazard wherever possible and ends with the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). One of the steps in the Hierarchy of Controls is Awareness, which ensures people have the information they need. Signage is often the best way to provide this.

**Questions?** We are here to help at any stage in your project planning

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# OSHA Compliance and Safety

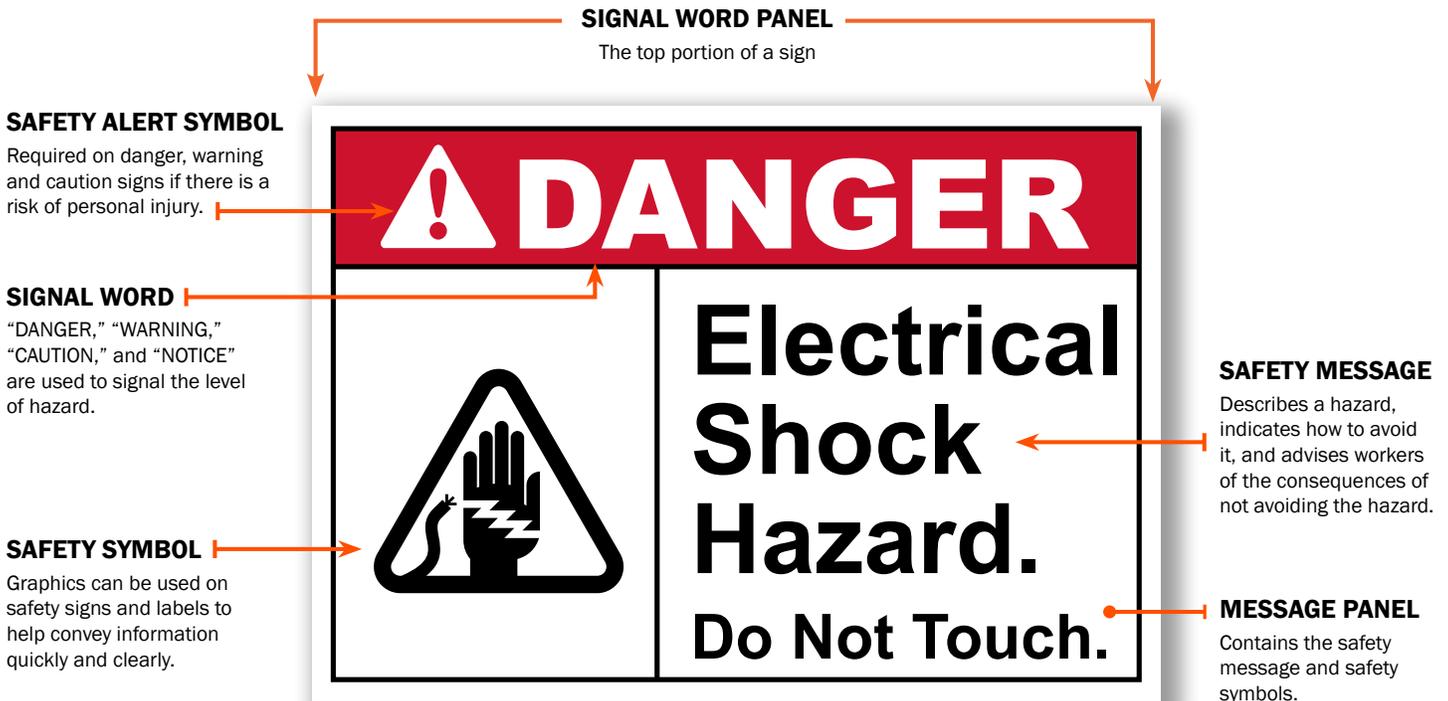
OSHA and ANSI standards apply to most educational institutions, manufacturing plants, warehouses, and other facilities across the United States. These standards require employers to provide a safe workplace by educating employees, contractors, and visitors on safety signage. OSHA defines what safety signs are, where they should be placed, and how they should be used. Both ANSI Z535 and OSHA §1910.145 establish safety sign standards, such as:

- Properly identified locations: All areas must be marked to prevent accidental injury to workers and the public, as well as to avoid property damage.
- Hazard-free signs: Safety signs must have rounded or blunt corners and no sharp edges, burrs, splinters, or other sharp projections.

Together, OSHA and ANSI provide the guidelines needed for effective visual communication, including the arrangement of text, symbols, and phrasing.



## OSHA COMPLIANT SAFETY SIGN



**NOTE:** Labels requiring OSHA compliance should follow OSHA and ANSI Z535 design standards to offer the highest level of safety. Be consistent in design so labels and signs are uniform. Variation may diminish recognition and add confusion to signs. Consistent design, color, safety symbol, signal word, and signal word panel are critical.

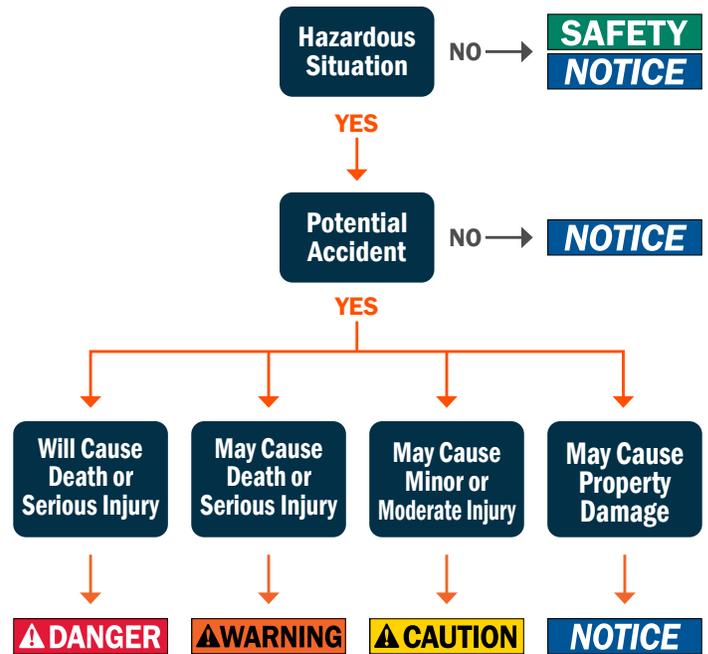
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# Sign Headers and Symbols

## Signal Word Panel

The top portion of a sign is known as the signal word panel. The words “DANGER,” “WARNING,” “CAUTION,” and “NOTICE” are located in this panel and are used to signal the level of the hazard. If there is a risk of personal injury, the signal word on danger, warning, and caution signs must be preceded with a safety alert symbol (an exclamation point inside an equilateral triangle). For general safety signs, appropriate signal words such as “STARTUP PROCEDURE” or “EMERGENCY SHOWER” are used. The chart below can help you choose an appropriate signal word.

Prevent confusion by using consistent safety signs throughout your facility. If your existing signs use the older signal word panels, it may be best to replace them with updated ANSI-compliant signs. The new designs are better at attracting attention, and when you update an old sign, it shows your workers that the message matters. Safety symbols help convey a message more quickly and clearly. There are several standards to follow when placing, coloring, and designing safety symbols.



## Safety Symbols

Safety signs and labels are often improved with safety symbols (pictograms). Safety symbols portray required actions, consequences, explicit direction, or the effects of interaction with certain chemicals, machines, and other hazards. More than one symbol can show a sequence of events or additional information relating to a single hazard.

Safety symbols should be consistent, readable, and easily understood. They usually consist of a black image on a white background.



## Surround Shapes

Consider using a surround shape to highlight your symbol. Do not use them if they detract from the safety sign message.



### HAZARD ALERTING

Use this triangle surround shape to bring attention to a safety symbol. The symbol should be drawn within a black equilateral triangle on a yellow background.



### MANDATORY ACTION

To convey required actions to avoid hazards use this round symbol. The safety symbol should be white and the round surround background should be solid blue or black.



### PROHIBITION

Use this to alert workers to prohibited activities or actions. The prohibited sign consists of a red or black circle with a diagonal slash from upper-left to the lower-right. The symbol must be on a white background.



### INFORMATION

The square (or rectangular) shape is typically used to convey equipment location, places of exit and permitted actions.

# Sign Classifications

There are three primary hazard classifications OSHA and ANSI have established for safety signs: **Danger**, **Warning**, and **Caution**. ANSI created and standardized most secondary sign classifications: **Biological Hazard**, **Notice**, **General Safety**, **Admittance**, **Fire Safety**, and **Non-hazard**.



## Primary Hazard Classifications



**DANGER** - Danger signs indicate the most serious hazards that require immediate attention to prevent death or serious injury.

The "DANGER" signal word appears in white letters on a red background with a safety alert symbol. The message panel beneath it displays the safety message, usually in black or red on a white background, or in white on a black background. Safety symbols (pictograms) may also be included to help workers identify hazards quickly and from a distance.

For radiation hazards, safety signs are strictly regulated by OSHA. These signs cannot vary from OSHA sign standards in any way.



**WARNING** - Although one hazard level below danger signs, warning signs indicate hazards that could result in serious injury or death if not avoided.

The "WARNING" signal word is printed in black on an orange background header and is followed by the safety alert symbol. The text in the message panel may be printed in white letters on a black message panel, or black letters on a white message panel.

Warning signs and labels can vary in size and format, but alternative designs and colors should only enhance comprehension to effectively warn workers of hazards.



**CAUTION** - A caution sign warns of potentially hazardous situations that may result in minor or moderate injury or equipment damage. For hazards that only involve equipment damage, refer to notice signs.

The "CAUTION" signal word is black on yellow with a safety alert symbol (except for non-personal injury). The message panel below contains the safety message and symbols, with text in black on white or white on black.

*In addition to these Primary Hazard Classification, Secondary Hazard Classifications can add further clarity for less dangerous situations and provide a chance to improve workplace efficiency.*

## Secondary Hazard Classifications

**NOTICE** - Use notice signs for important general information about buildings, areas, machines, or equipment, addressing non-injury-related practices.

The signal word "NOTICE" should be in white italic letters on a blue background. Notice signs have no safety alert symbol and feature a message panel in white



with blue or black text, or black with white text. Red, blue, or black safety symbols may be used. Notice signs provide information on procedures, operating instructions, maintenance, rules, or directions. They are not for personal injury hazards but can indicate equipment or property damage.

*Labels and signs printed on DuraLabel Print Systems allow custom messages. Visit [DuraLabel.com](http://DuraLabel.com) to learn more*



# Sign Classifications

## Secondary Hazard Classifications (continued)



**BIOLOGICAL HAZARD** - OSHA §1910.145(e)(4) states, “The biological hazard warning shall be used to signify the actual or potential presence of a biohazard and to identify equipment, containers, rooms, materials, experimental animals, or combinations thereof, which contain, or are contaminated with, viable hazardous agents... presenting a risk or potential risk to the well-being of man.” The symbol must match the example above and include “BIOHAZARD” or “BIOLOGICAL HAZARD.” The biohazard symbol can be black or orange with an optional background color, provided there is enough contrast for visibility. It may also appear on danger or warning signs with the safety alert symbol.



**GENERAL SAFETY** - Safety signs provide notices on facility practices, health rules, first aid, medical equipment, sanitation, housekeeping, and general safety measures. Safety instruction signs should use simple signal words like “SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS” or “SAFETY PROCEDURES.” For specific procedures, use terms like “SAFETY SHUTDOWN PROCEDURE.” Signs indicating safety equipment should be direct, such as “EYE WASH,” or use “SAFETY EQUIPMENT” for multiple items. The signal word, safety message, and symbol should be in green or black on a white panel. General safety signs must not include the safety alert symbol or the words “DANGER,” “WARNING,” or “CAUTION.”



**ADMITTANCE** - Admittance signs lack a defined hazard category and may incorporate elements from all other sign categories. Admittance signs can use any signal word with its corresponding background, such as danger, warning, caution, or notice. The safety message should clearly state the risk or consequences of entering a restricted area, like “Unauthorized Personnel, Keep Out,” or a general safety sign if no hazard is present. The primary action statement should be simple and directly address the hazard, such as “Keep Out.” Additional details about consequences or avoidance can be omitted if they are clear from context, and other signs can provide further safety information or procedures.

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**FIRE SAFETY** - Fire safety signs indicate emergency fire fighting equipment locations without a signal word. They feature a safety symbol in red on white or white on red, and the safety message in red on white. The safety alert symbol is not used.

Post these signs near or on fire equipment. Do not use them for wayfinding or emergency exit applications.



**NON-HAZARD** - Non-hazard signs convey general facility information and are used throughout a facility to describe routine actions or locations. They feature simple text and symbols and are not used for hazards, equipment damage, or injury threats. Examples include wayfinding arrows, maintenance info, work procedures, and general facility details.

While not classified as safety signs, these signs

support safety by encouraging proper trash disposal and guiding visitors, thus contributing to a safe workplace.



Non-hazard signs improve workflow by displaying operating procedures, maintenance schedules, or facility maps, providing clear general information at key locations for employees, contractors, inspectors, or visitors.

# Conduct a Facility Evaluation

## Start Your Path to Safety

Many areas of your facility require visual safety communication. To prepare for your project, it is best to conduct a walkthrough to identify areas in need of a signage.



## Facility Walkthrough Worksheet

Existing signs and labels	Yes	No	Notes
Are signs and labels consistent throughout your facility?			
Are they legible? (damaged, deteriorated, etc.)			
Are they accurate? (name, label color, etc.)			
Do they meet current OSHA and/or ANSI standards?			
Are they visible and readable from a safe distance?			
Do they effectively communicate the message?			

Areas where directional signs are needed	Yes	No	Notes
Are workers directed to the correct location?			
Is there clear direction to safety and fire equipment?			
Is the fire exit clearly marked?			
Are there areas where redirection is necessary?			

Hazardous areas not previously inspected or evaluated	Yes	No	Notes
Areas requiring safety signs that are not clearly posted?			
Areas where maintenance is performed?			
Areas where temporary signs are needed?			
New equipment and machinery?			
Forklift or Traffic areas?			

Once you have completed your walkthrough, you should have enough information to start creating the signs and labels you need to improve the safety and efficiency of your facility. Ready to get started?

# Create Safety Signs

## Guidelines

When determining the order of the message content, consider what the reader should know about a hazard and the necessary reaction time required to avoid danger. Follow these **basic guidelines** when writing a safety message:

- Use left-aligned text
- Use sentence-style capitalization
- Use sans-serif fonts (i.e. Helvetica or Arial)
- Avoid prepositional phrases
- Write in “headline style”
- Use active voice

**Larger text** is needed for visibility and legibility at a greater distance. ANSI standard bases its recommendations for the size of a sign’s text on the expected viewing distance for that sign.

The expected **viewing distance** will vary based on the situation, installation, lighting, and direction it faces. Remember that a worker should be able to read, understand, and obey the sign before being exposed to the hazard.



## Do It Yourself: On-site Sign Creation

### INDUSTRIAL SIGN & LABEL PRINTER

An **on-site printer** allows you to create the signs you need on demand. No more waiting for orders, address the safety or efficiency issue on the spot with a thermal transfer printer that creates long lasting messages. **DuraLabel** offers a wide variety of industrial print systems that can meet your needs. Check out [DuraLabel.com](https://www.duralabel.com) or call **877-534-5157** to discuss your project.



*Where and When You need it: Choose DuraLabel*

### VINYL SUPPLY

On-site sign creation also lets you take advantage of a wide variety of sign materials that fit your worksite needs:

- **Premium Vinyl** for tough signs in any location
- **Reflective** or **Phosphorescent** (“glow-in-the-dark”) material for low-light settings
- **Cold Storage Material** for refrigerated environments
- **Marine Label Stock** to withstand saltwater exposure
- **Ultra-Aggressive Vinyl** for rough or irregular surfaces
- **Oily Surface Material** for greasy surfaces



### ADDITIONAL TOOLS

Proper prep and labeling surface allows you to place signage where you need. Consider additional tools, such as:

- **Cleaning supplies**—to prepare a surface for labeling
- **Sign blanks** or angled sign holders—to make your finished sign more visible from different viewing positions



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