



1.0 Authority

Wisconsin Statutes s. 84.30 authorizes the department to regulate the erection and maintenance of billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising adjacent to the interstate system, federal-aid primary highways, and the Great River Road. Section 84.30(3)(a), Wis. Stats authorizes the department the power to promulgate rules for official signs relative to lighting, size, number, spacing, and other requirements. Additional standards for signs are found in Wisconsin Administrative Code Trans. 201.

2.0 Criteria for Official Signs

Official signs have specific requirements in order to be considered as an official sign. These provisions are outlined in s. [Trans 201.05](#).

1. An official sign must include all of the following:
 - a. The sign is erected and maintained by a public officer or agency;
 - b. The sign is located within the territorial or zoning jurisdiction of the public officer or agency;
 - c. The sign is located within a jurisdiction where the public officer or agency exercises governmental authority to enact or administer the law and erect and maintain signs and notices;
2. Application and Fees – A sign application is required to be submitted to the department; however, no application fees are required for official signs. A proposed official sign must meet all the criteria outlined in Trans 201.05 in order to qualify as an official sign. Proposed official signs are reviewed by the department for all eligibility requirements.
3. Whenever a permitted sign is removed by the owner without notice and approval from the department, it loses all rights to the location and any grandfathered status, where applicable. The erection of a new sign requires a new application and a new permit authorizing the sign. The sign must conform to all current criteria and requirements.

3.0 Acceptable Configurations of Official Signs

1. Message Content
 - a. The message, as determined acceptable by the department, must publicize, or announce an official duty or responsibility or an activity furthering an official duty or activity.
 - b. Signs advertising activities that are illegal under federal or state laws or regulations in effect at the location of the sign or at the location of the advertised activities are prohibited.
 - c. Signs including clusters of service club plaques are generally acceptable as long as the service clubs reside within the area of jurisdiction of the agency or officer erecting the sign and are valid and recognized service clubs.
2. Placement
 - a. *For interstate system:* Signs must be placed at least 500 feet from any intersection at grade, any interchange, or another sign.
 - b. *For non-freeway federal-aid primary highways:* Within unincorporated townships, signs must be placed at least 300 feet from any intersection at grade, any interchange, or another sign. Within an incorporated city or village, signs must be placed at least 100 feet from any other sign.

- c. *For interchanges:* The measurements shall be taken from where the pavement widens at the exit ramp from the main traveled highway.
- d. Signs must not obstruct any signs or markers used for traffic control, any state installed official signs or markers, or any other lawfully erected sign.
- e. Signs must not obstruct or interfere with a driver's view of approaching, merging, or intersecting traffic.
- f. Signs must not be erected or maintained on trees or painted or drawn on rocks or other natural features.
- g. Signs must not be located in rest areas, parklands, or scenic areas.

3. Size

No sign shall exceed a maximum area of 150 square feet, or a maximum height or length of twenty feet. The measurements shall include the border and trim but exclude the supports.

4. Design

- a. No sign shall resemble any traffic sign, signal, or any state installed official signs or markers.
- b. No sign shall have any moving or animated parts.

5. Lighting

- a. No sign shall contain, include, or be illuminated by any moving, flashing, or intermittent lights.
- b. No sign shall emit or reflect beams or rays of light on any portion of the traveled way or shall emit or reflect light of such intensity or brilliance as to cause glare or to impair or otherwise interfere with a driver's vision.
- c. No sign shall be lighted in such a way as to obstruct or interfere with an official traffic sign, device, or signal.

4.0 Permit Application and Site Review

1. Sign Permit Application

The sign application is found online at [WisDOT Outdoor Advertising Control System](#). It includes specific directions and must be filled out completely with all specified documents attached. An illustration of the proposed sign depicting the specific message on the sign along with the sign's height, length, and area are required. A map indicating the proposed location of the sign, depicting all distance/spacing measurements must be included. For more information, please refer to the official sign checklist [DT 1684](#).

2. Review of Proposed Official Sign Application and Site

The Bureau of Highway Maintenance Outdoor Advertising Unit reviews each sign permit application and proposed location prior to a sign's permit approval and sign installation. Verification of the proposed location includes measuring the distance between the sign site and the nearest intersection, interchange, and other signs to ensure spacing requirements are met. The location is also verified to ensure the proposed sign will not obstruct a driver's view of traffic or block another lawfully erected sign. All requirements of the official sign statutes and administrative code provisions must be met in order for the department to issue a sign permit.

3. All questions should be directed to the outdoor advertising unit in BHM. Web address for OA contacts: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/real-estate/outdoor-adv/oa-contacts.aspx>.

Regions receiving questions from communities should contact their BHM field coordinators assigned to the specific county.

For additional information visit the OA website at: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/real-estate/outdoor-adv/default.aspx>