A Timeline of Safety Sign Best Practices

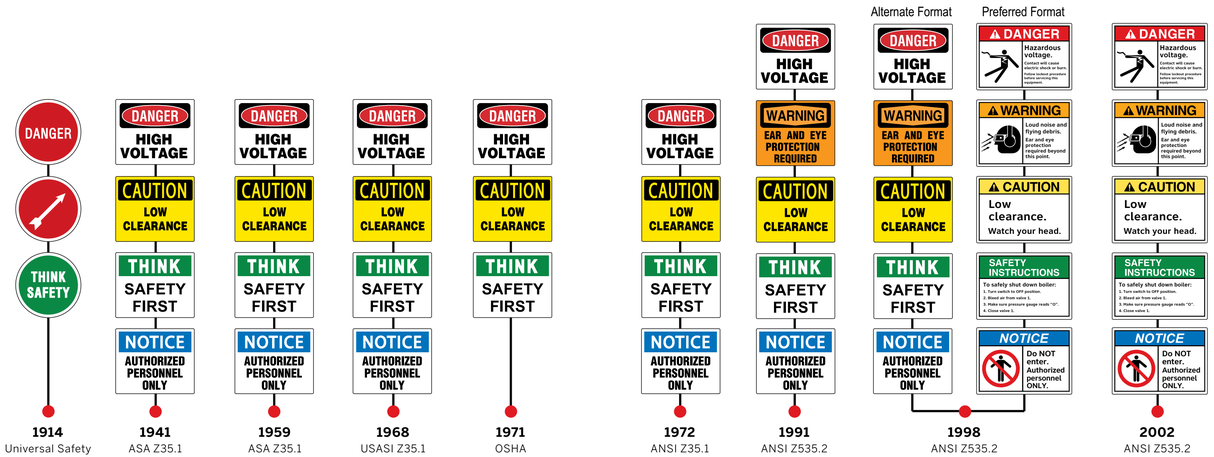
Clarion®
Reducing Risk, Protecting People

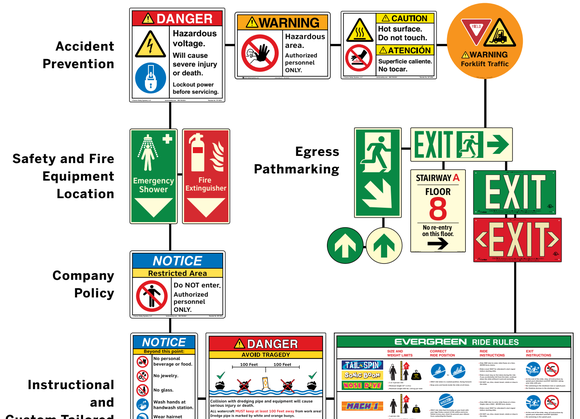
ANTIQUATED STANDARDS

TRANSITIONAL STANDARDS

CURRENT BEST PRACTICE STANDARDS

THE NEW ERA IN RISK COMMUNICATION





1914 Rules Lead to a New Standard in 1941

Since the early 1900s, signs have been used to communicate safety messages to workers to help prevent accidents. In 1914, the Worker's Compensation Bureau printed a comprehensive booklet on safety practices – the first published best practice guide for safety signs. The Bureau advocated the use of DANGER safety signs in combination with arrow signs that pointed to potential hazards. Between 1920 and 1940, various safety pamphlets and articles were published that encouraged the use of safety signs to communicate hazards. Then, in the late 1930s, a committee was formed by industry to write a national standard for safety signs. In 1941, ASA Z35.1 *Specifications for Industrial Accident Prevention Signs* was published. For the next 57 years this standard governed U.S. safety sign design.

OSHA Adopts the 1941-era Design Rules

In 1971, OSHA cited the 1967 version of the ASA Z35.1 standard as the basis for their regulations wherever safety signs were required.* Then, beginning in the 1980s, new safety sign technology started to be developed. Graphical symbols were becoming recognized for their ability to communicate quickly and across language barriers. Risk and hazard analysis methodologies were developed to reduce risk in both public areas and workplaces. Global trade was increasing. And U.S. court precedents set a new legal framework for liability that hinged on the "duty to warn" and "inadequate warnings." In 1985, the ANSI Z535 committee was formed to rewrite the Z35.1 standard to incorporate the latest safety communication best practices that would give users the ability to meet the new legal bar for providing "adequate" warnings.

*Note: Clarion led OSHA to change its safety sign regulations in 2013. OSHA standards now allow organizations to use the latest ANSI Z535 standards' formats instead of the 1967 Z35.1 formats.

ANSI and ISO Define New Best Practices

In 1991, the ANSI Z535 standards were approved for publication, ushering in the modern age of U.S. safety sign design. These standards established a three-tier, color-coded system of hazard severity recognition for safety signs, labels and tags. A new symbol standard used ISO methodologies for comprehension testing and encouraged the use of symbols and pictograms to more effectively communicate safety. In 1998, the ANSI Z535.2 safety sign standard and Z535.5 safety tag standard began phasing in use of the newer, content-rich ANSI Z535.4 product safety label formats. By the 2002 ANSI Z535 revision, all three standards fully adopted the use of the newer formats and the old 1941-era OSHA-style formats were discarded. The 2007 revision of the ANSI Z535 standards then realized a decade's worth of international harmonization efforts by incorporating ISO safety sign design principles. Another advancement in standards harmonization occurred in 2006 when NFPA replaced many of its fire and emergency safety symbols with the official ISO symbols having the same meanings.

Clarion Best Practice ANSI/ISO/NFPA Sign Systems

Implementing state-of-the-art risk communication in your workplace is about selecting safety signs, labels and tags that comply with the latest ANSI, ISO and NFPA best practice standards. It is essential to understand that each sign, label, tag and marking should be designed to be part of an overall "system" of safety communication meant to reduce risk and promote safe work behaviors. Consistent use of the latest standards-based design principles for symbols, color-coding, formatting and message content is crucial to achieving effective risk reduction.