

Knowing Safety and Laws is Everyone's Responsibility

By Darrel Lockard, Circuit Rider

As I was looking for a topic to write about, I found this one on the Senate bill 179. The first section is what was first out and the second section is for clarification, both of which are right off the ODOT web site.

Senate Bill 179 was enacted during the 2003 legislature. The bill defines a school zone and also introduces changes to the current speed statutes that govern school area speeds. Previously statutes specified two conditions when a reduced school speed was to be in effect. "When Flashing" (flashing lights operating when children were arriving or leaving school) or "When Children are Present" (when children are visible to the motorist or can reasonably be expected to be visible).

The recently passed legislation, Senate Bill 179, makes sweeping changes in Oregon's school zone laws. The new law defines school zones in terms of either segments of roadway adjacent to the school grounds or school crosswalks away from (not adjacent to) school grounds. In addition the law distinguishes between those segments of adjacent roadways that are 30 mph or less and those that are 35 or mph or greater.

The law establishes some school zones as school speed 20 zones at all times, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (for those school zones adjacent to school grounds and 30 mph or less). In addition other school zones (those adjacent and 35 mph or greater and those crosswalks away from school grounds) may post hours when the school speed zone is in effect or may use "When Flashing". "When Children are Present" is limited only to crosswalks away from school grounds.

School speed zone changes start July 1, 2004
For more information, contact Jay Remy of ODOT at (503) 986-4180

The new law in Oregon aimed at clarifying the definition of school zones goes into effect July 1, 2004. The law specifies speed and signing requirements in two areas: school zones adjacent to schools and school crossing zones away from

school property. The law also distinguishes between roadways where speed limits are 30 mph or less and those that are 35 mph or greater.

School zones adjacent to schools on roads with a posted speed limit of 30 mph or less are 20 mph zones at all times, according to the new law. That applies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year-round.

"That means that the speed limit will be 20 mph at all times: early in the morning, weekends, and holidays" said Doug Bish, traffic services engineer for the Oregon Department of Transportation. "The new rules may be difficult for motorists to memorize, so they need to watch carefully for the new signs. The best way to avoid a ticket is to obey whatever the signs say."

In school zones on roads where the posted speed is 35 mph or higher, times of the 20 mph speed limit will be defined by one of two options. Signs will post specific hours, or flashing lights will signal when the 20 mph speed limit is in effect.

Three options are available for crosswalks not adjacent to school grounds. The reduced speed limit will be in force when lights are flashing, when children are present, or during posted hours.

"Drivers will need to be careful to read the signs," Bish said.

The change is the result of Senate Bill 179 passed by the Oregon Legislature last year in an attempt to clear up confusion about what constitutes a school zone, and when speed limits are reduced.

"Legislators wanted to eliminate any indecision about when drivers needed to slow down," said Troy E. Costales, administrator of ODOT's Transportation Safety Division. "Schools and school grounds get used more than during class times. The law isn't about protecting property. It's about protecting kids."

For more information about the school zone speed limit changes, please visit www.odot.state.or.us/traffic/school/school.htm .