

First edition
2020-08

Corrected version
2020-10

**Graphical symbols — Safety colours
and safety signs — Guidance for the
development and use of a safety
signing system**

*Symboles graphiques — Couleurs de sécurité et signaux de sécurité —
Lignes directrices pour le développement et l'usage d'un système de
signaux de sécurité*

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Reference number
ISO/TS 20559:2020(E)

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Published in Switzerland

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 145, *Graphical symbols*, Subcommittee SC 2, *Safety identification, signs, shapes, symbols and colours*.

This corrected version of ISO/TS 20559:2020 incorporates the following corrections:

- space has been added between the two examples in Figure 2.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

The primary objective of safety signing systems is to support the provisions of a safe and healthy workplace or public area.

For those responsible for the health and safety of people in an organization or for the safety of people in a public area, implementing an effective safety signing system is a strategic and operational decision. The success of these systems of visual safety communication depends on leadership, commitment and participation from all levels and functions of the organization.

The information contained in this document gives safety professionals a “systems” approach to safety signage that works in tandem with an organization’s occupational health and safety management system (see ISO 45001).

Several ISO documents have been written for the design of the components of safety signing systems. This document provides a framework for systematically using these safety sign components to reduce risk by accurately communicating:

- the nature of potential hazards in facilities and related to equipment, and how to avoid these potential hazards;
- the location of essential safety equipment and fire equipment;
- the accurate identification of materials and related safety precautions;
- evacuation paths that lead persons to a place of safety.

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IMPORTANT — The colours represented in the electronic file of this document can be neither viewed on screen nor printed as true representations. For the purposes of colour matching see ISO 3864-4, which provides colorimetric and photometric properties together with, as a guideline, references from colour order systems.

1 Scope

This document serves to complement the basic standards for safety signs: the ISO 3864 series, ISO 7010, ISO 16069, ISO 23601 and ISO 17398, as well as ISO 45001. This document contains recommendations and explanations on the practical application of safety signs to form a system of communication intended to reduce risk.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 3864-1:2011, *Graphical symbols — Safety colours and safety signs — Part 1: Design principles for safety signs and safety markings*

ISO 7010, *Graphical symbols — Safety colours and safety signs — Registered safety signs*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 3864-1 apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

4 General

In many ways, safety signs, labels and markings function as systems of visual information that provide permanent evidence to support an organization's safety training and safety policies. In fulfilling this function, these systems of signage assist an organization to fulfil its legal requirements and demonstrate its commitment to placing the highest priority on the health and safety of its employees and the public. Safety signs function as "systems" in the following ways:

- Each sign or marking component is made up of a system of standardized elements meant to convey a specific meaning within the context of its installed location (e.g. safety colour coding, graphical symbols, shape and layout, supplementary information).
- Each of the components of a safety signing system as defined in [Clause 5](#) is meant to function as a system of signs to convey a certain type of standardized safety communication (e.g. egress routes, the location of fire and safety equipment, hazard identification and avoidance).

- Within a specific facility, safety sign system components function as a unique system of signage that can easily be distinguished from other types of installed signs and markings.
- When an organization chooses to adopt and use the ISO standards related to safety signage, that organization joins a global system of safety communication that uses a common visual language to reduce risk.

Standardization and consistency play key roles in helping people to recognize and understand safety signs. This document is written so organizations can best utilize the ISO standards related to this field of communication in their efforts to minimize risk and protect people from harm (see Bibliography).

5 Safety signing system components

5.1 General

Where hazards cannot be adequately reduced by techniques for collective protection or by measures, methods or procedures used in the organization of work or in the function of the facility, a consistent and standardized system of safety signs should be used to communicate essential safety information.

Safety signing system components include:

- signage on evacuation routes;
- fire equipment signs;
- signs indicating the location of safety equipment or a safety facility, or a safety action (safe condition signs);
- signs for accident prevention (e.g. warning signs, prohibition signs and mandatory action signs);
- escape and evacuation plan signs;
- pipe and tank identification/safety markings;
- safety markings;
- product safety labels.

5.2 Signage on evacuation routes

In case of an emergency situation, this component of the safety signing system provides a permanent means to visually communicate the location of evacuation routes, providing people with a clearly marked path to the outside or to a place of safe refuge to wait for evacuation by intervention forces. This category of safety signage includes, but is not limited to:

- emergency exit signs (low, intermediate and high located) that use graphical symbols and colours, conforming to ISO 7010 with supplementary arrow sign (type D of ISO 3864-3) in white on green for directional information (see [Figures 1](#) and [2](#));

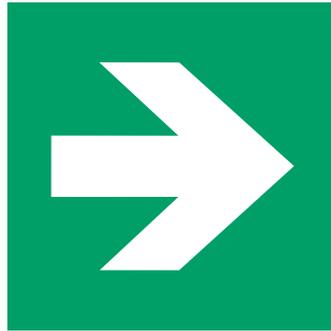
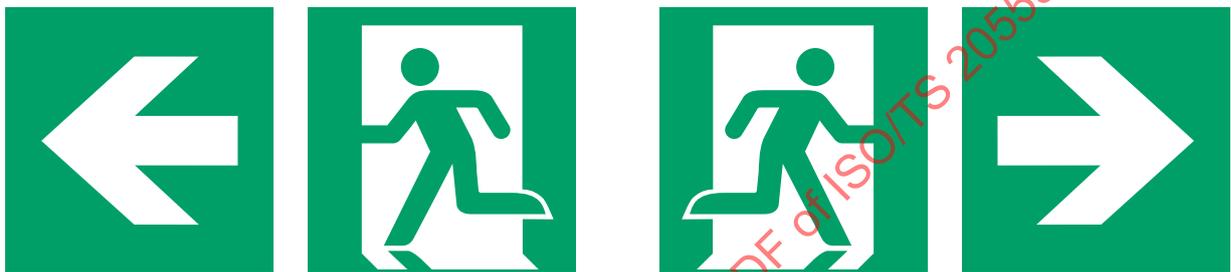


Figure 1 — Supplementary arrow sign, type D of ISO 3864-3



a) Supplementary arrow sign in combination with ISO 7010-E001 “Emergency exit (left hand)” b) Supplementary arrow sign in combination with ISO 7010-E002 “Emergency exit (right hand)”

Figure 2 — Examples of the supplementary arrow sign

- guidance line markings to delineate escape routes, stairs, obstacles, exit door frames and push-bar mechanisms, conforming to ISO 16069;
- signs that indicate changes in floor level, roof access and stairway identification, conforming to ISO 16069;
- signs that indicate safe refuge areas and indoor/outdoor assembly points, conforming to ISO 7010;
- safety signs that indicate the location of evacuation chairs, emergency windows with ladders, rescue windows, door opening instructions, emergency hammers, emergency escape breathing devices and escape ladders, conforming to ISO 7010;
- safety signs that indicate the location of protection shelters, tsunami evacuation areas and tsunami evacuation buildings, conforming to ISO 7010;
- escape map/plan signs that depict primary and alternative escape routes, conforming to ISO 23601;
- signs that indicate escape routes for people unable to walk or with walking impairments.

5.3 Fire equipment signs

In case of a fire, this component of a safety signing system provides a permanent visual indicator of the location of fire safety equipment. These signs also function to provide an accurate visual reference for verification that each piece of fire equipment is physically present in its intended location. The organization’s health and safety management system plan defines the intended users for each type of

fire equipment (e.g. by building occupants or by firefighting intervention forces). Fire equipment signs include, but are not limited to:

- fire extinguisher signs that use graphical symbols and colours conforming to ISO 7010 to indicate the direction to fire extinguishers (when a fire extinguisher cannot be seen from a given vantage point) and, when placed on or above each actual fire extinguisher, to indicate the extinguisher's location;
- fire alarm call point signs that use graphical symbols and colours conforming to ISO 7010 to indicate the direction to fire alarm call points (when a fire alarm call point cannot be seen from a given vantage point), and, when placed on or above each actual fire alarm call point, to indicate the alarm's location;
- fire equipment signs that use graphical symbols and colours conforming to ISO 7010 to indicate the position of fire hose reels, fire emergency telephones and fire blankets.

Supplementary directional indicators may be used in combination with fire equipment safety signs to communicate the location of the equipment (see [Figures 3](#) and [4](#)). To avoid confusion with directional guidance given by the arrows used on escape and safety way guidance route signs, ISO 3864-3 Type D arrows should not be used for indicating the direction to equipment.



Figure 3 — Example of directional indicator for fire equipment

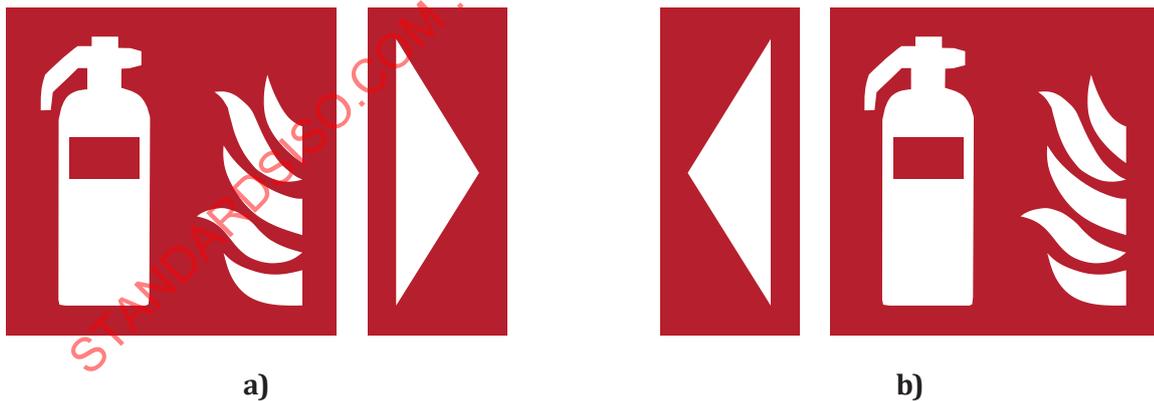


Figure 4 — Examples of directional indicator used in combination with ISO 7010-F001, Fire extinguisher

5.4 Signs indicating the location of safety equipment or a safety facility or a safety action (safe condition signs)

In case an incident occurs that results in injury to people, this component of a safety signing system provides a permanent visual indicator of the location for safety equipment or a safety facility. These signs also function to provide an accurate visual reference for verification that each piece of safety

equipment is physically present in its intended location. This category of safety signs includes, but is not limited to, signs that use graphical symbols and colours conforming to ISO 7010 to:

- indicate the location of automated external defibrillators;
- indicate the location of first aid stations, first aid supplies, stretchers, oxygen resuscitators and medical personnel;
- indicate the location of emergency eye wash stations and emergency showers;
- indicate the location of emergency stop buttons to stop processes or equipment.

Supplementary directional indicators may be used in combination with safety equipment signs to communicate the position of the equipment (see [Figures 5](#) and [6](#)). To avoid confusion with directional guidance given by the arrows used on escape and safety way guidance route signs, ISO 3864-3 Type D arrows should not be used for indicating the direction to equipment.



Figure 5 — Examples of directional indicator for safety equipment

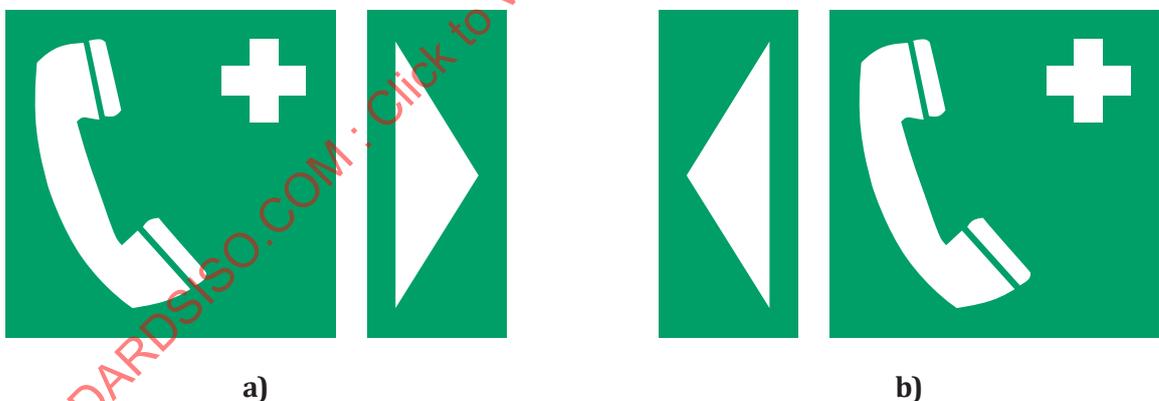


Figure 6 — Examples of directional indicator used in combination with ISO 7010-E004, Emergency telephone

5.5 Safety signs for accident prevention (warning signs, prohibition signs and mandatory action signs)

This component of a safety signing system warns people of potential risks and instructs them on how to avoid potential risks. Safety signs for accident prevention must conform to ISO 3864-1.

Typically, ISO 7010 warning signs are used to explain the nature of the hazard, whereas ISO 7010 prohibition signs and ISO 7010 mandatory action signs are used to explain how to avoid the potential hazard.

Supplementary text, symbols or both may be added to a safety sign for accident prevention to reinforce the meaning of the ISO 7010 symbols, to communicate the level of risk or to communicate relevant instructional information. See 6.6 for information on the use of combination and multiple sign formats.

Examples of types of potential hazards communicated by a system of safety signs for accident prevention include, but are not limited to:

- confined spaces;
- electrical hazards;
- flammable/explosive materials;
- high pressure;
- biohazards and radiation;
- mechanical hazards (e.g. pinch points, entanglement, crush);
- low clearance;
- lifting/load limitations;
- temperature extremes;
- collision with industrial vehicles;
- chemical hazards.

Examples of hazard avoidance messages communicated by a system of safety signs for accident prevention include, but are not limited to:

- the need to wear specific types of personal protective equipment;
- prohibited movement;
- disconnecting and locking out various forms of power to equipment prior to maintenance;
- operating machinery only with guards in place;
- specific instructional information needed to avoid injury;
- prohibition of actions with a risk of injury.

5.6 Escape and evacuation plan signs

Escape plans are an integral part of a facility's safety signing system and play an integral role in an organization's fire safety management plan. Escape plans are also a necessary component of a safety way guidance system (ISO 16069). Displayed escape plans contain information relevant to fire safety, escape, evacuation and rescue of the facility's occupants. These plans can also be used by intervention forces in case of emergency. According to ISO 23601, escape plans include, but are not limited to, the following information:

- identification of all escape routes;
- location of all fire-fighting equipment and alarms;
- location of emergency equipment and evacuation aids;
- required actions to be taken in case of emergency or fire;
- location of refuge and assembly points.

5.7 Pipe and tank markings

This component of a safety signing system communicates risks associated with the contents of pipelines and tanks. Clearly identifiable markings should be used to indicate the pipe or tank's content and to identify potential hazards associated with the pipe or tank's content.

5.8 Safety markings

5.8.1 General

This component of a safety signing system uses alternating diagonal banded colour-coded safety markings conforming to ISO 3864-1 to draw attention to various types of safety-related areas, equipment and conditions.

5.8.2 Yellow/black

Alternating diagonal banded yellow/black coloured safety markings conforming to ISO 3864-1 may be used to identify areas to indicate the possibility of specific risks. Examples of such areas include, but are not limited to:

- collision with obstacles;
- fall hazards;
- intersections where people cross in the path of industrial trucks;
- trip hazards;
- limited overhead clearance.

5.8.3 Red/white

Alternating diagonal banded red/white coloured safety markings conforming to ISO 3864-1 may be used to indicate, for example, when entry into a specific area is prohibited.

5.8.4 Green/white

Alternating diagonal banded green/white coloured safety markings conforming to ISO 3864-1 may be used in association with ISO 7010 safety signs to indicate a safe condition or the location of safety equipment. Examples of the use of green/white safety markings include, but are not limited to:

- eyewash stations and safety showers;
- escape windows and escape hatches;
- access to escape ladders.

5.8.5 Blue/white

Alternating diagonal banded blue/white coloured safety markings conforming to ISO 3864-1 may be used in association with ISO 7010 mandatory action safety signs to identify a mandatory action.

5.9 Product safety labels

Product safety labels conforming with ISO 3864-2 communicate messages concerning the safe use of devices, equipment and products used in facilities. Similar in content to safety signs for accident prevention, equipment safety labels use ISO 7010 warning signs to communicate the nature of potential hazards associated with the use of the equipment, and ISO 7010 mandatory action signs and ISO 7010 prohibition signs are used to communicate how to avoid potential hazards.

Supplementary text, symbols or both can be added to a product safety label to reinforce the meaning of the ISO 7010 safety sign(s) appearing on the label, to provide additional information, to communicate the level of risk or to communicate relevant instructional information.

6 System component selection plan

6.1 General

The scope of an organization's safety signing system will depend in part on the nature of the organization's activities and the health and safety risks related to those activities. A safety signing system component selection plan should be created to document the decisions that were made to specify each system component. The component selection plan should include information related to each of the criteria provided in this clause.

6.2 Use of risk assessments and the hierarchy of controls

Today's risk assessment methodologies recognize the fact that not every risk in a facility can be completely eliminated. The organization's safety signing system serves to communicate important information concerning residual risks, serving an essential role in the continued safety and health of the organization's people.

The planning of an effective safety signing system begins as an outcome of an organization's risk assessments, including risk assessments associated with emergency preparedness. In connection with the hierarchy of controls, the components of a safety signing system assist the organization to control risk in a variety of ways (see ISO 45001:2018, 8.1.2 and A.8.1.2). Examples include, but are not limited to:

- the communication of the proper identification of processes, operations and materials (e.g. pipe markings, tank markings, safety instructions, safety signs for accident prevention);
- the communication of instructional information related to the safe use of equipment and the safe execution of processes (e.g. product safety labels, safety signs for accident prevention);
- the communication of engineering controls (e.g. safety signs for accident prevention that notify personnel of requirements to keep guards in place during operation, to use adequate ventilation or to isolate power sources before performing maintenance);
- the communication of administrative controls (e.g. the reinforcement of safety training and awareness of security policies using safety signs for accident prevention, safety notices, work permits and prohibited access);
- the communication of the need to use adequate personal protective equipment (e.g. the use of safety signs for accident prevention and product safety labels that prescribe the use of specific personal protective equipment in defined areas or when specific processes are taking place);
- the communication of emergency preparedness procedures (e.g. the delineation of egress routes with escape and safety way guidance system components, escape map/plan signs, fire and safety equipment signs, and instructional signs for the safe use of fire and safety equipment such as fire extinguishers and automated external defibrillators).

The safety signing system component selection plan should note the risk assessment documentation relevant to the selection of each group of safety sign system components.

6.3 Selection of the type of signing system component and its content

When it is determined by a risk assessment that a safety signing system component is needed to assist the organization to control a residual risk, the organization should:

- choose the type of safety sign system component(s) that will best communicate the needed safety message (see the list of components specified in [Clause 5](#));

- use the latest version of the ISO standard related to that type of safety sign system component to design the safety sign, label or marking (see Bibliography);
- check the latest version of ISO 7010 for relevant registered safety signs to include in the design of the component (all safety signs are available on the ISO online browsing platform at <https://www.iso.org/obp>.)
- decide whether or not to include supplementary text, symbols or both to assist in communicating the component's intended message;
- choose the right material for each group of safety sign system components in relation to their planned installation positions according to 6.7.

The safety signing system selection plan should document the choices made for each of these content-related and material-related decisions for each group of safety sign system components.

6.4 Consistency

Consistency in the formatting, colours, symbols and supplementary information displayed on safety signing system components can help people to more easily recognize and understand their safety messages. Conformity to the design principles for safety sign system components as defined by the standards listed in the Bibliography will help to ensure consistency with international best practices in safety sign and marking design.

The organization's safety signing system selection plan should specify the ISO standards related to each group of safety signing system components.

6.5 Comprehension training

When possible, the target audience for an organization's safety signs should be trained in the meaning of the safety signing system components. Displaying informative charts that explain the meaning of the types of components and the symbols used on components can be helpful to increase recognition and understanding.

The safety signing system selection plan should note if comprehension training of the meaning of one or more safety signing components will be done for specific groups of people.

6.6 Use of combination signs and multiple signs

6.6.1 General

Combination sign formats use an ISO 7010 safety sign and one or more associated supplementary signs to communicate safety information about a single potential hazard.

Multiple sign formats combine two or more ISO 7010 safety signs and associated supplementary signs on the same rectangular carrier to convey safety information about two or more potential hazards on a single sign.

Both types of formats are useful for efficiently communicating safety information. See ISO 3864-1 for example layouts.

Supplementary signs should, however, not alter the safety message of the safety sign associated with the supplementary sign, nor use the safety message of another safety sign.

When using multiple sign formats, factors to consider when determining the order of information that appears on the sign include:

- the target audience's degree of prior knowledge of each hazard;
- the reaction time required to avoid each hazard;

- the seriousness of the hazard;
- the severity and probability of injury;
- the obviousness of the hazard or avoidance procedure.

6.6.2 Use of supplementary signs in combination signs and multiple signs

Whereas the graphical symbols used in the coloured surround shape of an ISO 7010 safety sign must not contain text and must not use colours other than the safety colour of the safety sign and its contrast colour as defined in ISO 3864-1:2011, Table 1, and must not include fine details (see ISO 3864-3), supplementary safety information symbols may include numbers, letters and more detailed (finer) symbol elements, and the symbols (or any portion of the symbols) may have any colour.

In supplementary signs, the following graphical elements may be used to indicate “proper” (correct) or “improper” (incorrect) use:

- 1) a green tick indicating proper (correct) use;
- 2) a red cross or diagonal bar indicating improper (incorrect) use.

For an example see [Figure 7](#).

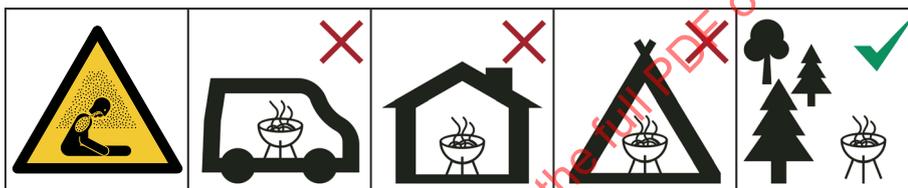


Figure 7 — Example of a combination sign with supplementary safety information symbols indicating proper/improper use

The green tick may be replaced by another element appropriate to the cultural requirements of the target audience.

The organization’s safety signing system selection plan should document when combination signs, multiple signs or both will be used.

6.7 Selecting sign materials

6.7.1 General

The technical material specifications for each safety signing system component should be chosen to meet the anticipated environment of use that each sign or marking will be exposed to.

NOTE For material quality considerations, see ISO 17398.

Conditions to consider include, but are not limited to:

- fading from outdoor exposure;
- adhesion failure;
- chemical resistance;
- abrasion from contact (e.g. floor markings abraded by foot or vehicle traffic);
- vandalism;
- unwarranted removal.

The organization's safety signing system selection plan should document the choice of materials to be used for each group of safety signing system components and the reason(s) for the material choice.

6.7.2 Luminous materials

Luminous signs and markings can be either phosphorescent (pre-excited by another light source) or electrically internally illuminated.

In addition to the mandatory use of luminous materials for all escape and safety way guidance signs and markings, consideration should be given to using luminous materials for fire equipment signs, safety equipment signs and alternating diagonal-banded safety colour markings. Doing so enables these components to serve their function of communicating important information in power-out conditions.

Use of luminous materials for these safety sign system components also aids in providing building occupants with visual cues to orient themselves during power-out conditions.

6.8 Elimination of outdated existing safety signs and markings

The planning of a new safety signing system takes into account all of the organization's existing safety signs and safety markings and

- eliminates signs and markings that are no longer needed;
- replaces signs and markings that do not meet the design requirements as set forth by the latest version of the standards listed in the Bibliography.

The organization's safety signing system selection plan should document which existing signs and markings will remain installed and which existing signs and markings will be removed. The selection plan should also document the reasons for keeping or removing existing signs and markings.

7 Installation plan

7.1 General

After the organization's new sign system components have been selected, but prior to their purchase, the organization should create a safety signing system installation plan that specifies the chosen size, orientation and location for each safety sign system component. The overall objective of the installation plan is to ensure that each system component is located at a position and height that allows the intended viewer to legibly see and understand the component's message at a safe viewing distance from all intended vantage points.

The safety signing system installation plan should include information related to each of the criteria provided in [7.2](#) to [7.5](#).

7.2 Display

When installed, safety signs should be displayed in their position as illustrated in ISO 7010. For examples, see [Figures 8](#) to [10](#).



a) Right



b) Wrong

Figure 8 — Examples of a) right and b) wrong displays of the safety sign ISO 7010-P002 “No smoking”



a) Right



b) Wrong

Figure 9 — Examples of a) right and b) wrong displays of the safety sign ISO 7010-W005 “Warning; Non-ionizing radiation”



a) Right



b) Wrong

Figure 10 — Examples of a) right and b) wrong displays of the safety sign ISO 7010-E013 “Stretcher”

7.3 Orientation

When installed, signs should be oriented in such a way that their information can be legibly viewed from every intended viewer position. Four types of sign mounting orientations are typically used:

- Sign mounted parallel to the wall, see [Figure 11](#): the installation of signs parallel to the wall allows people to see the sign best in a viewing direction facing the wall.

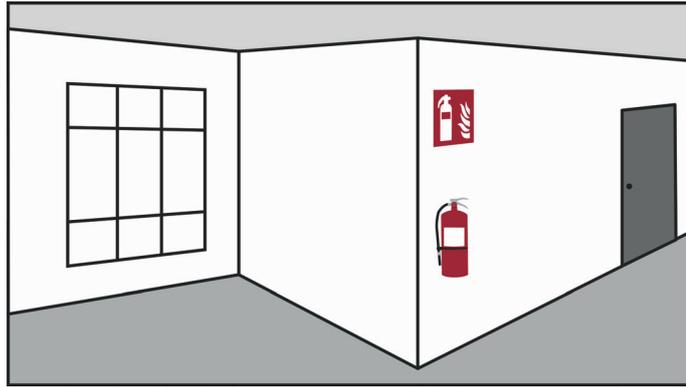


Figure 11 — Example of a safety sign mounted parallel to the wall

- Sign mounted perpendicular to the wall, see [Figure 12](#): the installation of two-sided signs perpendicular to the wall (either ceiling mounted or wall mounted) allows people to see the sign best from either side in a viewing direction along and parallel to the wall.

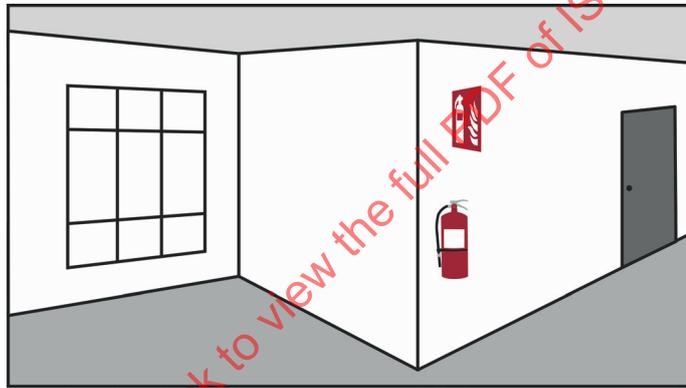


Figure 12 — Example of a safety sign mounted perpendicular to the wall

- Panoramic sign, see [Figure 13](#): the installation of two-image panoramic signs allows a wide range of angular viewing positions and directions of approach to the sign in a wide space.

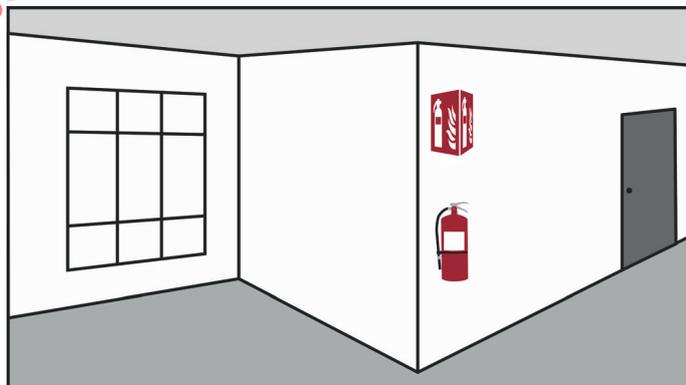


Figure 13 — Example of a panoramic safety sign

- Box sign, see [Figure 14](#): the installation of three- or four-image box signs on a pole in an open space allows a viewing angle of 360° from every position in the given area.