

ROAD SIDE SIGNAGE:

Although you may not be consciously aware of it, road side *signage* in its various forms, such as directional, informational or advertising signs are very important. However, it may very well be these same signs that can cause many problems, such as *information overload*, *distraction* and *obstruction*. It is quite likely that you have or will most likely suffer from *information overload* at some stage, to some extent, or experience a *distraction* or *obstruction* cause by *signage* at some stage.

Information overload takes on various forms and with the pressure of modern day societies need to always be ahead, two almost indispensable items assisting this need are prime examples of *information overload*, the cell phone and the internet. In the past we had to go look for results, look for information and find things, now we are constantly reminded and informed by email, cellular reminders, radio, television and *signage*.

Remember that occasion when you reached home and not wanted the television on nor music, no cell phone and neither the sound of traffic or noisy neighbours, well you have probably suffered *information overload* to some extent.

Information overload, *distraction* & *obstruction*, are not uncommon realities and are actually well documented in various forms. Traffic safety practitioners such as road design engineers or personnel appointed to conduct road safety audits often consider *information overload*, *distraction* & *obstruction* as a factor in road safety.

Road *signage* in all forms, such as that seen in the example alongside can be most useful, and without it, even those living in a particular city could find it difficult to find their way around.



Although we see that for the most part road traffic *signage* is typically well positioned having being carefully considered during implementation, it is other *signage*, or secondary *signage* that very often wreaks havoc. This secondary *signage* takes on many forms, and is generally considered advertising *signage*.

This advertising *signage*, much like advertising email, can be most informative and helpful, not to mention a substantial revenue creator to your local metropolitan. However, as can be seen in the photographic examples below, it is most often this advertising *signage* that creates the unwanted, unnecessary, potentially dangerous, and sometimes unlawful “littering” of what is usually road side light or utility poles. This littering can in certain circumstances create *information overload*, *distraction* & *obstruction*, not to mention be quite unsightly.



Inappropriately placed *signage*, such as those placed too low or at the incorrect location or that may be glaring or distracting, may impede a road user’s vision. This arbitrary positioning of *signage*, not like that of the carefully thought out traffic signage, can create severe *distractions* or *obstructions* to a road user. It is for this reason that city bylaws govern the various specifics of such signage, especially such factors as size, location and even removal.

Although it may seem logical to some, and perhaps not to others, the



impact and effect that advertising signage can have is well documented. As an example, and perhaps one of the more common scenarios, is a driver stopped at a traffic light reading an advertising sign board. Clearly this is a *distraction* from what the driver should be doing, such as checking the alternative traffic or the general surroundings. This very often leads to the “delayed pull off” and impatient hooting from following drivers; some would call this a form of road rage. Hence we see that such a small *distraction* can be a danger to yourself as well as an irritation to other road users. Perhaps one could also argue that the somewhat endemic problem of high-jacking can be heightened by the opportunities presented by the *distraction & obstructions* caused by road side *signage*.

Logically, most would agree that aesthetically, *signage* or perhaps the over utilisation there of can cause the appearance of an area being dirty, disorganised or neglected. This is very often most evident by the non removal of dated advertising. This kind of *signage* “overcrowding” is often evident in high traffic areas such as near bus stops, entrance or exits to shopping malls and at intersections where traffic lights cause delays creating a window period in which time the advertiser hopes that his *signage* will grab your attention.

Ironically, it is at these densely populated areas, especially those areas made use of by pedestrians, cyclists and motor cycle riders, also seen as soft target road users, that specific attention should be paid to the strategic placement or use of *signage*. Pedestrians, cyclists and motorcycle riders are generally smaller, slower moving objects that are more likely to be missed by a motorist, having been *obscured* by signage, or where a road user has been *distracted*.

A quick search of the internet reveals volumes on the subject, with extensive research done both internationally and locally covering the subject of road traffic signage *information overload, distraction & obstruction*, as well as the issue of street pole littering, with certain cities lobbying strongly for the total eradication of such forms of advertising *signage*.

One needs only stop at the next busy intersection when travelling and look around, it is almost inevitable that signs, be they road *signage*, legal advertising or inevitably illegally placed or outdated signage will be evident. Although these issues are not endemic to Durban, or perhaps even our province alone, it is clearly evident that signage has and seems to be on the increase in and around certain areas. It is important that the same authorities that implement and control the laws governing signage use, take responsibility in ensuring the implementation of the laws by following up on such issues as illegal signage, be they unauthorised or “outdated”, or illegally placed signage.

Take a drive through your city centre, and then through a quiet residential suburb, and it quickly becomes evident that the age old adage of “*less is more*” is quite appropriate.

Here’s to fewer signs for safer and cleaner roads

Safe driving.