



# HERE'S YOUR ANSWER

## What are the Legal Speed Limits?



### MN Statute 169.14

Speed laws are created for the protection of the public and the curbing of unreasonable behavior. To effectively enforce a law, the public must believe that the law is reasonable. Minnesota's speed regulations are based on the same Basic Speed Law that is used in all 50 states: "No person shall drive a vehicle on a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions".

Statutory limits are based on the concept that uniform categories of highways can operate safely at certain preset maximum speeds under ideal conditions. Whether the speed limit is posted or unposted, drivers are required to reduce speed below these values for poor weather conditions, curves or hills and potential hazards such as pedestrians. Drivers must also reduce speed when approaching or passing emergency vehicles with emergency lights flashing.

These are the most common statutory speeds:

- 10 mph in alleys
- 30 mph on streets in urban districts
- 70 mph on rural interstate highways
- 65 mph on urban interstate highways
- 65 mph on expressways
- 55 mph on other roads

Whenever these statutory speed limits are not the correct value for a specific highway, the commissioner of transportation authorizes the posting of other regulatory speed limits.



**Interstates** are high design multi-lane divided highways that have controlled access interchanges such as cloverleaves or diamond shaped interchanges. Through traffic on the interstate never has to stop or yield. *Examples: I-94 or I-35*



**Expressways** are multi-lane divided highways but they have entries and intersections, sometimes controlled by traffic signals. Some interchanges may exist but they are not the rule. *Examples: Highway 10 or Highway 52*

## How Does Mn/DOT Determine the Regulatory Speed Limit?

The commissioner of transportation sets regulatory speed limits on state and local roads based on a thorough engineering and traffic investigation.

These factors are considered:

- road type and condition
- location and type of access points (intersections, entrances, etc.)
- sufficient length of roadway (1/4 mile minimum)
- existing traffic control devices (signs, signals, etc.)
- crash history
- traffic volume
- sight distances (curve, hill, etc.)
- test drive results
- speed study

The most important part of the traffic investigation is the speed study. When choosing a speed, drivers take many roadway environment factors into consideration. Therefore, the speed that the majority of people consider prudent is an important value. Data is collected by performing radar checks at selected locations on the roadway under ideal driving conditions. A technical analysis is done on the results to determine the 85th percentile. This is the value indicating the speed at which most (85%) drivers are traveling under. Experience has shown that a posted speed limit near this value is the maximum safe and reasonable speed. Studies have shown that traveling much faster or slower than this value can increase your chance of being in a crash.

Engineering judgement is an important tool. The traffic investigator must use knowledge of nationally accepted principles combined with experience to assign the safe speed.



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[www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng)

## What are the Types of Speed Limits?

### REGULATORY SPEED LIMIT SIGN



This black and white sign shows the maximum speed that a motorist may travel under ideal conditions. It can be a statutory value or else it must be authorized by the commissioner of transportation.

### ADVISORY SPEED SIGN



This black and yellow speed sign is used to advise motorists of a comfortable speed to navigate certain situations. It is used with a warning sign. For instance, when traveling on a winding road, the curve warning sign would be used with an advisory speed sign. This sign may be posted by the local road authority on local roads.

### SPEED LIMITS IN SCHOOL ZONES



Local authorities may establish school speed limits on local streets, within a school zone, upon the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation as prescribed by the commissioner of transportation. This regulatory speed limit is in effect whenever children are present, such as before and after school or during recess. The school plate is black and yellow and the other signs are black and white. Optional fluorescent yellow green may be used for the school plate.

### SPEED LIMITS IN WORK ZONES



Advisory speed limits are used to identify safe speeds for specific conditions within a work zone. These black and orange signs are always used with warning signs. The local road authority can post these plates in work zones on local roads.



Work zone speed limits are short term regulatory speed limits that are established for worker safety due to traffic in adjacent lanes. These speed limits range from 20 mph to 40 mph on two lane-two way roads and up to 55 mph on divided highways. They can be posted by the local road authority in active work zones on local roads. The FINES DOUBLE plate is black and orange and the speed limit sign is black and white.



Temporary speed limits in construction zones are sometimes needed for long term construction projects or detour routes. These regulatory black and white signs are used when a reduced speed is needed for driver safety. Valid 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, these must be authorized by the commissioner of transportation for any roadway.

See the website: [www.dot.state.mn.us/speed](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/speed) for more information on "Work Zone Speed Guidelines"

## Questions & Answers

### Will lowering the speed limit reduce speeds?

NO. Studies show that there is little change in the speed pattern after the posting of a speed limit. The driver is much more influenced by the roadway conditions.

### Will lowering the speed limit reduce crash frequency?

NO. Although lowering the speed limit is often seen as a cure-all in preventing crashes, this is not the case. Crashes are most often the result of driver inattention and driver error. However, if a posted speed limit is unrealistically low, it creates a greater speed variance (i.e. some drivers follow the speed limit while most drive the reasonable speed). This speed variance can contribute to crashes.

### Why do we even have speed limits?

A uniform speed of vehicles in a traffic flow results in the safest operation. The posted speed limits can keep the traffic flowing smoothly provided the majority of drivers find the speed limits reasonable. To best do this, the limits must be consistent throughout the state. The speed limits also give the motorist an idea of a reasonable speed to drive in an unfamiliar location. The speed limits are used by police officials to identify excessive speeds and curb unreasonable behavior.

## Who Do I Contact?

If you believe that there is a safety concern or an inappropriate speed limit posted, the person to contact depends on the type of road.

### TRUNK HIGHWAYS

For regulatory and advisory speed limits on the trunk highway system, you may contact the district traffic engineer at your Mn/DOT district office.

The trunk highway system includes:

- Interstate Highways,
- U.S. Highways and
- Minnesota State Highways

### LOCAL STREETS AND HIGHWAYS

For these roadways, you may contact your local road authority (county, city, or township). For advisory speed limits: The local road authority can determine these advisory speeds and post the plates without authorization from the commissioner of transportation. For regulatory speed limits: The local road authority can pass a resolution requesting an investigation by Mn/DOT. Based upon the results, Mn/DOT may then authorize the local road authority to post new speed limits.

The phone numbers to call for state or local assistance can be found in the phone book under government listings. If you are unable to find the proper phone number, you may call the Mn/DOT Information Center at the following numbers:

**1-800-657-3774 Greater Minnesota or  
651-296-3000 Twin Cities Metro Area**



## Safety Notes

- DOUBLE FINES** will be imposed for violating any regulatory speed limits in work zones or in school zones. Fines are also double for failing to reduce speed when passing by a stopped emergency vehicle with its lights flashing.
- When an **EMERGENCY VEHICLE** is approaching you, move to the closest shoulder without crossing the path of the approaching emergency vehicle. You may proceed when the emergency vehicle passes you. If you are approaching a stopped emergency vehicle with its lights flashing, immediately reduce speed and, if it's safe to do so, move over in your lane away from the stopped emergency vehicle. Drivers should actually change lanes if there are two or more lanes in the same direction and there are no vehicles in their path.