

Written Warnings

Designing and selecting warnings is not a frivolous activity. Many different factors must be analyzed and incorporated into a solution. Every aspect of a warning label must be thought out in a thorough, systematic fashion. Warning labels must fit the following criteria:

1. The warning must alert the user of the hazardous condition
2. The warning must be understandable
3. The warning must communicate the nature of the hazard
4. The warning must contain information on how to avoid the danger which the hazard presents.
5. The warning must communicate the consequences of not following the warning's message.

We will address each of these criteria to present the current methods of warning design.

1. The warning must alert the user of the hazardous condition

This is the first criteria of warning design. The warning label must get the attention of the user. The attention-getting value of a warning label is affected by many variables. These variables can include the color, size, and shape of the warning, the location of the warning label on the product, the use of signal words, and other factors. Michael S. Wogalter and Kenneth R. Laughery write in their article 'Warning! Sign and Label Effectiveness', "Most environments are cluttered and noisy, so in order to attract attention, warnings must be conspicuous or salient relative to their context. Principles from basic research on selective attention indicate that factors such as novelty, size, illumination, contrast, and location (both spatial and temporal) affect salience. Additional factors that may help capture attention include a signal word (e.g., "DANGER," "CAUTION,"), a signal icon (e.g., triangle enclosing an exclamation point), color (e.g., red is associated with stop and danger in many cultures), or a picture (referred to in the warnings literature as a *pictorial*) illustrating that hazard or consequences. For example, one study measuring the time it took people to find warnings on alcoholic beverages labels showed that a warning that was colored red and included a signal icon (triangle enclosing an exclamation point) and pictorial (circle and slash over a car and cocktail

glass) was noticed significantly faster (2.07 s) than a warning without these features (2.80 s).”