

## Getting people to police themselves

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It is a fact: Speed kills. According to the Federal Highway Administration, more than 80,000 pedestrians are injured or killed in speed-related accidents every year. In Tigard, Oregon, a suburb of 44,000 outside Portland, pedestrian injuries and fatalities made safety a primary concern, especially in local school zones.

Tigard High School is the most dangerous school zone in the school district. Located on a busy thoroughfare that connects two major highways, it is traveled by more than 10,000 cars per day in each direction. Motorists were frequently ticketed for driving in excess of 40 mph in an area where the posted speed limit is just 20 mph during school hours. Consistent police presence was effective in enforcing the speed limit, but limited police resources made it impossible to patrol the school zone regularly. And, because of the high traffic volume, traffic calming devices including speed bumps and traffic circles were not suitable in this area.

In April 2003, the community proposed a high-tech solution to curb speeding in the school zone in front of Tigard High School. Information Display Company, a local manufacturer of radar and electronic speed display equipment, donated an electronic speed display sign to the City of Tigard for a 90-day trial period to assess its effectiveness in reducing motor vehicle speeds in the school zone.



The community worked together to make the SPEEDCHECK sign in front of Tigard High School a permanent solution to a serious public safety problem. Pictured here are senior officials from the Tigard-Tualatin School

Board, School District Administration, High School Administration, the City of Tigard, Oregon, the Tigard Police Department, Tigard Kiwanis Club, and the Tigard High School Key Club, who gathered to celebrate the installation of the sign.

The fluorescent green speed display sign uses radar technology to detect vehicle speed. As drivers pass the sign,

their speed is displayed in red numbers using LED technology—an approach that has proven effective in reducing driver speed in cities and counties across the country.

The City of Tigard Public Works Department installed the pole-mounted sign, connecting it to a 12-volt battery. Upon installation of the speed display sign, there was an immediate reduction in speed in the school zone, with motorists slowing by up to 20 mph. "As soon as the sign was installed, motorists started slowing down," says Jim Wolf, public information officer for the Tigard Police Department. "Installation of the speed display sign has reduced speeding in the school zone overall, even during non-school hours."

The Tigard Police Department immediately began seeking grant money to make the sign a permanent fixture. The Tigard Kiwanis Club offered to contribute funds toward the purchase of the speed display sign and, in recognition of their civic commitment, Information Display Company offered a generous discount to the organization. With the donation from the Tigard Kiwanis Club, coupled with funds from the Tigard-Tualatin School District and the Tigard High School Key Club, the City of Tigard purchased the speed display sign in July 2003.

There has been strong support for the use of a speed display sign to slow traffic in the school zone at Tigard High School. Community members have congratulated the Tigard Police Department and the City of Tigard for taking action to improve community safety. "Within hours of the sign being installed, I had received e-mails from members of the community offering their support," says Tigard Police Chief Bill Dickinson.

Faculty and staff at Tigard High School also applaud the city for taking action to reduce speed in the school zone. "I strongly support having the speed sign in front of the school," says Barb Proctor, associate principal at Tigard High School. "School safety is very important to us and [the speed display sign] is a constant visual reminder to slow down."

Over the past year, the Tigard Police Department has noted a marked decrease in speeding violations in the school zone, which they credit to the installation of the speed display sign. From January through March 2003, the three months prior to the installation of the speed display sign, the Tigard Police Department issued 59 citations for speeding. From April through June 2003, the three months after the sign's installation, the number of citations dropped to 20—a 66-percent decrease.

The effectiveness of the speed display sign has prompted the City of Tigard Public Works Department to permanently hardwire the sign, eliminating the need to change and charge the 12-volt battery weekly. The cost to permanently wire the sign is estimated at \$3,000. "Hardwiring is more expensive initially," explains Howard Gregory, the street supervisor for the City of Tigard Public Works Department. "But over a short period of time it will more than pay for itself."

The Public Works Department has already noticed advantages to using the speed display sign over other methods of traffic calming: Initial installation took approximately 30 minutes, compared with several hours to install speed bumps or traffic circles, and costs much less than other traffic calming methods.

In the year since its installation, the sign has required almost no maintenance (with the exception of changing the battery). And despite the fact that the speed display sign came equipped with anti-graffiti film and a shatter-proof outer shell, the Public Works Department has not had a single incident of vandalism.



**SPEEDCHECK radar signs display vehicle speeds to passing motorists in front of Tigard High School, one of the most heavily-trafficked school zones in the Tigard-Tualatin School District. Speed display technology has been shown to significantly reduce speeding, resulting in fewer pedestrian accidents and fatalities.**

The Federal Highway Administration reports that for every one mile per hour in speed reduction, there is a five percent reduction in speed-related accidents and injuries—a statistic the Tigard Police Department believes speaks for itself. "There is no question that radar signs enhance safety in the community," says Dickinson. "We are supportive of anything we can do to improve safety."

The collaborative efforts of numerous city agencies, including the Tigard Police and Public Works Departments, the Tigard-Tualatin School District, the Tigard Kiwanis Club and Information Display Company, have dramatically improved safety in a local school zone. "Building a community partnership was instrumental in making the project happen," says Mark Chism, chair of the Tigard-Tualatin School Board.

In the future the Tigard Police Department and the Tigard-Tualatin School District hope to install speed display signs in every school zone in the city. "The idea of having these signs in all of our school zones has a lot of merit," Chism says. "The school board would give it serious consideration."

"These signs are a cost effective means of getting people to police themselves," adds Dickinson. "They are relatively inexpensive considering the work they do to improve community safety."

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***Editor's Note:** The following CD is an excellent resource that addresses neighborhood traffic calming issues: It's Your Street: Making Traffic Improvements. It can be ordered online at [www.apwa.net/bookstore](http://www.apwa.net/bookstore) or call the Member Services Hotline at (800) 848-APWA, ext. 3560.*