

Australian Safety Signs in the Workplace: Types, Meanings and Compliance

Safety signs aren't just a box to tick. They are critical to creating a safe work environment and avoiding the potential dangers that come with poor visibility, unclear instructions, or non-compliance.

According to Safe Work Australia, **40% of workplace fatalities** involve workers who weren't clearly visible, especially in high-risk areas like construction sites and roadworks.

In this guide, we'll break down the types of [safety signs](#), what they mean, and how to use them correctly to meet Australian Occupational Health and Safety standards and protect your team.

What is AS 1319-1994?

AS1319-1994 is the Australian Standard that defines how safety signage should look and be used in workplaces. It's the blueprint for ensuring every type of safety sign on your site is consistent, visible, and easy to understand.

Purpose:

- Make safety signs effective and standardised
- Use consistent colours, shapes, and symbols so workers know what to expect

Classifications of Safety Signs Covered:

- **Prohibition signs:** Red circle with a diagonal slash over a black pictogram (e.g., "No Smoking")
- **Warning signs:** Yellow triangle with a black pictogram (e.g., "Hazardous Chemicals")
- **Mandatory signs:** Blue circle with a white pictogram (e.g., "Wear Personal Protective Equipment")
- **Emergency information signs:** Green rectangle with white text and symbols (e.g., "First Aid")
- **Fire safety signs:** Red rectangle with white text and symbols (e.g., "Fire Extinguisher")

Note: [Traffic control](#) and illuminated signs are covered by separate standards.

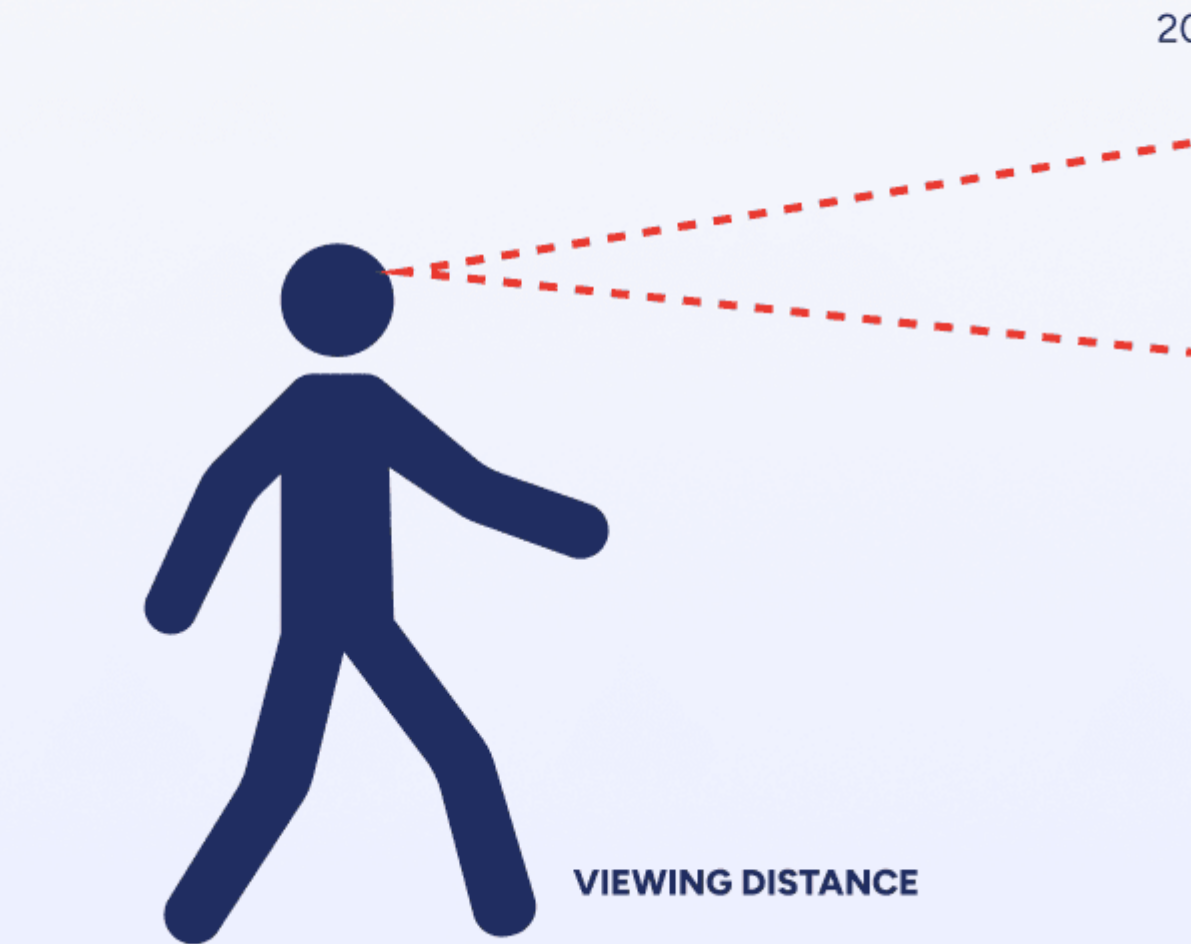
Design Requirements:

- **Shape and Colour:**
 - Specific colour schemes to distinguish each sign type (e.g., red for prohibition, yellow for warning)
 - Distinct geometric shapes (e.g., circles for prohibition and mandatory, triangles for warnings, rectangles for information and fire safety)
- **Pictograms:**
 - Black or white symbols, simple and universally recognised
 - Designed for instant comprehension, regardless of language or literacy
- **Text:**
 - Clear, legible lettering in contrasting colours

- Font sizes appropriate to the viewing distance, ensuring readability
- **Size:**
 - Pictograms: At least 15 mm in height for every metre of viewing distance
 - **Text height:** Upper case letters should be at least 5 mm high per metre of viewing distance. Lowercase letters should be at least 4 mm high per metre of viewing distance.
- **Reflectivity and Illumination:**
 - Where necessary, signs must be reflective or illuminated for visibility in low-light conditions
- **Durability:**
 - Made from premium, high-quality materials that withstand environmental factors like UV exposure, chemicals, and physical wear

Placement and Visibility:

- Signs must be installed at eye level or where they're easily seen
- Located in well-lit areas and free from obstructions like stacked materials
- Must never be hidden by equipment, storage, or other signage



Note: In poor lighting conditions, you may not see the sign.

A sign that's blocked, faded, or too small is as good as no sign at all. For the full details, refer to the AS1319-1994 standard [here](#).

Why Workplace Safety Signs Are Non-Negotiable

Safety signage is a legal requirement under Australian law. Here's why they belong at the top of your compliance checklist:

- **Legal Requirement Under WHS Regulations**
 - The Work Health and Safety (WHS) Regulations 2011 mandate that employers provide signage to warn workers and visitors of hazards and guide them to safety.

- Non-compliance can result in hefty fines, with severe penalties reaching over \$3 million for a corporation and up to \$600,000 for individuals under the Model WHS Act.
- **Critical in High-Risk Industries**
 - Safe Work Australia's 2024 data shows construction accounted for 23% of all workplace fatalities, while transport, postal, and warehousing industries made up 62%.
 - Clear, visible signage helps reduce confusion and prevents work-related injuries in these high-risk environments.
- **Visibility Saves Lives**
 - More than 40% of roadwork-related fatalities involved workers who weren't clearly visible to drivers.
 - Proper signage (containing safety messages), alongside high-visibility clothing, significantly reduces the risk of a moderate injury and serious incident by making hazards obvious.
- **Supports Risk Management**
 - WHS Regulations require employers to identify hazards, assess risks, and implement controls.
 - Safety signs are a key part of this process, marking hazards and communicating safety procedures effectively.
- **Reduces Legal Liability**
 - The right signage can protect your business. Without it, your insurance may be invalidated or your liability increased in the event of an incident.
 - Documented, compliant signage shows you've taken reasonable steps to manage risks—a crucial defence in any workplace claim.

Types of Safety Signs

1. Prohibition Signs

- Purpose: Tell workers what actions are **not allowed**.
- Design: A **red circle with a diagonal slash** over a black pictogram on a white background.
- Common examples:
 - **No Smoking** (cigarette symbol)
 - **No Entry** (walking figure with a slash)
 - **No Mobile Phones** (phone symbol with a slash)

1. Warning Signs

- Purpose: Alert workers to **potential hazards** that might not be obvious at first glance.
- Design: **Yellow background** with a black border and a black triangle enclosing a pictogram.
- Common examples:
 - **Hazardous Chemicals** (test tube and liquid drop)
 - **Forklift Operating Area** (forklift truck symbol)
 - **Slippery Surface** (person slipping)

1. Mandatory Signs

- Purpose: Show what actions workers **must take** to stay safe.
- Design: **Blue circle** with a white pictogram showing the required action.
- Common examples:
 - **Wear Protective Equipment** (hard hat, gloves, safety goggles)
 - **Use Hearing Protection** (earmuffs symbol)
 - **Eye Protection Must Be Worn** (safety glasses symbol)

1. Limitation/Restriction Signs

- Purpose: Indicate **specific limits** on how work is to be carried out.
- Design: Usually **black text or symbols on a white background**, sometimes with a red circle to emphasise a restriction.
- Common examples:
 - **Speed Limit: 10 km/h**
 - **Maximum Load 2T**
 - **Authorised Personnel Only**

1. Danger Signs

- Purpose: Highlight **immediate, life-threatening hazards** that require urgent attention.
- Design: **Red oval** with the word “**DANGER**” in white, set on a black background above a white rectangle with black text describing the hazardous condition.
- Common examples:
 - **Danger: High Voltage**
 - **Danger: Confined Space**
 - **Danger: Explosive Atmosphere**

1. Emergency Signs

- Purpose: Help workers **find safety equipment and emergency exits** during emergencies.
- Design: **Green background** with white pictograms and text.
- Common examples:
 - **Exit** (running figure and arrow)
 - **First Aid** (white cross on green background)
 - **Assembly Point** (group of people)

1. Fire Safety Signs

- Purpose: Show the location of **fire safety equipment** and exits.
- Design: **Red background** with white symbols and text.
- Common examples:
 - **Fire Extinguisher** (fire extinguisher symbol)
 - **Fire Hose Reel** (reel with hose)
 - **Fire Exit** (running figure with flames)

1. Special Signs

- Purpose: Cover **site-specific hazards or instructions** that don't fit into the standard categories.
- Design: Varies depending on the message but must be consistent and easily understood.
- Common examples:
 - **Restricted Area** (usually with a red border and black text)
 - **Biohazard** (black biohazard symbol on yellow background)
 - **Housekeeping Required** (blue background or green background with text)



PROHIBITION



MANDATORY



EMERGENCY



FIRE

Best Practices for Using Safety Signs

Effective [safety signage](#) only works when it's clear, relevant, and in the right place. Here's how to make sure your signs actually do their job:

Choose the Right Sign: Match the sign to the hazard. Don't improvise. Stick to AS1319-1994 for correct categories and design: prohibition, warning, mandatory, emergency, and so on.

Place Signages Where They Matter: Keep them at eye level, in well-lit, high-traffic areas. For hazards specific to an area (such as chemicals or heavy machinery), position the sign close to the hazard so workers can respond quickly and appropriately.

Keep Signs Clean and Legible: A dirty or faded sign is as good as no sign. Inspect regularly. Replace or clean as soon as they lose impact.

Train Your People: Make sure everyone knows what the signage means. Include signage and safe practices in inductions and refreshers. Reinforce the message; signs are only useful if people follow them.

Make Signs Part of Your Safety System: Include them in your regular inspections. Keep records of where signs are, when they were checked, and when they were replaced. It shows you're serious and helps with audits.

Don't Overdo It: Too many signs create confusion. Focus on key hazards and place them strategically. Less clutter, more clarity.

By following these best practices, you'll not only comply with Australian safety regulations but also foster a safer, more proactive safety culture. Remember: the right sign, in the right place, with the right message.

Benefits of Using RF's Safety Signs

RF's safety signs offer businesses a reliable, compliant, and durable solution to ensure a safer workplace environment. Here's how [RF's signs](#) can benefit your business:

Australian-Made Assurance: By choosing RF safety signs, businesses are assured of locally made, high-quality products that are fully compliant with Australian standards. Supporting local manufacturing not only helps businesses stay compliant but also contributes to the economy.

Durability and Quality: RF's caution signs are crafted from tough, long-lasting materials built to handle harsh weather conditions. Whether facing extreme weather or high-traffic areas, these signs remain clear, visible, and reliable for years.

Tailored Solutions: Businesses can create custom safety signs that fit their specific needs with RF. Whether for construction, healthcare, or emergency services, RF delivers durable, high-quality solutions that meet the unique demands of your workplace.

By choosing RF's Australian-made safety signs, you provide a durable, compliant, and customisable solution to enhance workplace safety, protect employees, and ensure legal compliance.

Choose RF for Your Safety Signs

Safety signs in the workplace act as your frontline defence against workplace accidents and confusion. Every sign, from prohibition and warning to fire safety and emergency, plays a role in protecting your team. AS1319-1994 sets the benchmark for compliance, ensuring your signs are clear, consistent, and understood by everyone on site.

If your signage isn't up to scratch, it's time to act. At RF, we specialise in high-quality, Australian-compliant safety signs designed to keep your employees safe and your site fully compliant. Don't leave safety to chance. [Get in touch](#) with us today to discuss your signage needs and make sure your workplace conditions stand out for all the right reasons.