

# The colors of safety

By Ame Larson

## Before you begin

Look around your facility and obtain (or take pictures of) various safety signs or placards, which show the safety colors and markings your company uses. You may also wish to include some common colors or markings from other facilities or public places. Display the items you collect, and use them for reference as you progress through this lesson.



## Introduction

Colors and markings communicate important safety information to workers both on and off the job. Most people encounter and recognize some safety cues every day from colors and markings they see routinely (traffic signals). Unfortunately, we observe some colors or markings so often that they just seem to become part of the background clutter.

We need to periodically reinforce the meaning and importance of colors and markings, and discuss how they can help protect people from harm. This safety talk's purpose is to provide your employees with that information and stimulate discussion about the use of colors and markings at your facility.

## Common safety colors

The American National Standards Institute established rules, which define how you should use colors to communicate information. This standardization helps you easily recognize and understand what message a color is communicating. Examples are:

- Red
  - Fire protection equipment
  - Danger, high risk of severe injury or death
  - Emergency stops and alarms
- Orange
  - Hazard warnings
  - Moderate risk of injury
  - Guarding devices
- Blue
  - Notice of information
  - No immediate hazard
- Green
  - Safety equipment or information
  - First aid equipment or location
- Yellow
  - Caution statements
  - Minor risk of injury
  - Material-handling equipment

### Vehicle or container placards

Trucks, rail cars and other containers must have placards attached in clear view to communicate any hazards of the contents. Some of the placards may also use symbols with the colors to convey the proper message. Discuss which of these placards you may find at your facility or on vehicles delivering hazardous materials.

1. Red - Combustible or flammable
2. Yellow - Oxidizers
3. White - Poison or toxic
4. Orange - Explosives
5. Green - Non - flammable gas
6. Red and white stripe - Flammable solid

Special color and stripe combinations identify hazards such as corrosives, reactive materials or biohazards. You may choose to show examples of these items if they are present at your facility. For more information, check with your safety department.

### Other safety colors and markings

There are numerous other ways you can use colors and markings to communicate safety information. Ask participants to give examples and record responses on a flip chart to stimulate discussion. Possible ideas include:

1. Color-coded paint on piping and equipment to identify contents or use;
2. Striped or painted floors, roadways or parking lots to mark personnel and vehicle-traffic pathways;
3. Barricade tape to restrict entrance or divert traffic;
4. Reflective markers to improve night-time visibility of hazards;
5. Hazard information labels.

### Group actions

Have participants take the quiz below, then review and discuss the correct answers. Based on the information presented here, ask them to observe how your facility uses color and report any changes or additions that may be needed to improve safety.

**Quiz** (Circle T for true or F for false.)

1. A blue sign indicates danger ahead. T or F
2. Only trucks carrying fuel need placards. T or F
3. Fire-protection equipment should be painted red. T or F
4. Safety equipment is usually painted green. T or F
5. Caution signs are normally purple. T or F
6. The NFPA diamond color yellow indicates reactivity. T or F

Answers: 1.F; 2.F; 3.T; 4.T; 5. F; 6.T.

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