



Compliance – Resource Bulletin

National Recreation Symbols

Overview:

National Recreation Symbols were created by the Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD) in order to “provide a common, nonverbal language to transmit information to park visitors regardless of their native language.” [1] There are currently 190 symbols that are in use at United States National Parks.

There are four types of symbol formats: Positive, Positive (reverse), Prohibition, and Warning. The Positive symbols are usually a dark figure and border with light background. The Positive (reverse) symbols are displayed in reverse with a brown background and white image/border. The Warning symbols are black symbol with yellow diamond background. The Prohibition symbols are a black image set on top of a red circle and slash.

Resources:

National Park Symbol Library: (Free)
SEGD: (Free)

<https://www.nps.gov/maps/tools/symbol-library/>
<https://segd.org/symbols>

Sign Requirements:

The Prohibition sign has a different design than the previously mentioned types of signs. This sign is a red circle and slash behind a black figure and it is used to indicate the prohibition of an activity. This type of sign varies from other prohibitive types of signs because the slash mark is set behind the image. This is designed this way so that the image will be more visible.



Another reason that the slash mark is placed behind the image, instead of in front of it, as is shown in a common “No Smoking” sign, is to allow for better understanding of the image on the sign. Studies show that people are better able to understand an image’s meaning if it is not cut across by the red line. The image is much clearer to the viewer, so it is less likely that the sign would be misinterpreted.



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(National Recreation Symbols Continued)

These symbols are “considered an international pictographic language,” but it is important to note that some people may not fully understand what the symbol is trying to express.^[1] In cases like this, legends are added to signs to further clarify information. This is especially helpful when using a prohibited sign, as the user needs a clear understanding of what the sign is portraying. That is also why the slash mark on the prohibition sign is behind the image; clarification is key to understanding these types of signs.



Prohibition signs with the slash mark behind the image are used for recreational signs. These tend to be seen in places like state and national parks, and other areas where various recreational activities take place. Some examples of the types of signs that this pertains to are: no fishing, no dogs, no strollers, no cars, no boating, no skateboarding, and no camping. There are many other symbols that are used to keep people from participating in various activities.

It is important to note that there are some prohibition symbols that do have the slash in front of the image. These types of signs are used in many different places, not just in recreational areas. Examples of these would be: no smoking signs, no weapons, no cell phones, no photography, and no chemical waste. There are several other examples of this type of image, but this covers some of the main signs.

Conclusion:

While all of the National Recreation Symbols are designed to be clear and understood by all, the Prohibition symbol stands out amongst the others because of its design. Keeping the design simple and having the image shown on top of the red slash, make for an easily understood sign. This format “allows for maximum contrast and legibility.”^[1]

For Recreation Signs please visit our store:
<https://www.compliancesigns.com/recreation.shtml>

[1] Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD)