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The Sign Program Newsletter US Army Corps of Engineers

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In This Issue

Welcome back to *The Sign Post*, the informal periodic newsletter of “topics of interest” to Corps employees involved with signs and the National Sign Program.

This issue features an article that explains why the Army star logo has been added to select Corps signs and provides references to implementing that change.

The remainder of the newsletter is geared toward new project Sign Program Managers (SPMs) who are just getting started with their duties. Purchasing signs and installing them are two of the biggest challenges for a new SPM.

Happy Spring, everyone!

Army Star Logo on Select Signs

AJ Jensen

National Sign Program Manager

The Standard Identification and Construction Identification signs have been modified to display the Army star logo, by directive of the Chief of Engineers.

During a meeting last May, the Chief expressed the need for the public to understand that it is the U.S. Army that directly serves the public through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. To emphasize the over-riding role of the Army, he instructed the Army star logo to be placed onto the two sign types that most prominently display the Corps Signature: the Standard ID and Construction ID signs.

The Chief envisioned Army star logo decals being a key way to address this. He instructed the Chief of Operations and Chief of Natural Resources to have the

National Sign Team (National Sign Program Manager and Sign Advisory Work Group) update the standards and modify currently standing signs with Army star logo decals.

Mindful of the need to establish and maintain standards consistent with the Sign Standards Program, the Sign Team contemplated several different design and layout options. Field testing began in July. As the team received feedback, they adjusted the implementation plan.

Many of you took part in the push to place the Army star logo decals onto select signs that had room for them.

In January, an *Engineering and Construction Bulletin (2020-1)* was released with the new specifications for the Army star logo



The Corps Signature is now accompanied by the Army star logo on Standard ID and Construction ID signs

placement on Construction Identification signs. In March, a memorandum was published with the new specifications for Army star logo placement onto the Standard Identification signs. These documents may be downloaded from the NRM Gateway at <https://corpsslakes.erd.c.dren.mil/employees/sign/sign.cfm> and serve as official guidance for the Sign Program until next edition of the *Sign Standards Manual* is released.

This recent guidance for the placement of the Army star logo onto USACE signs applies only to the Standard Identification and Construction Identification signs. It does not apply to directional signs or any other type of sign. For clarification, consult the referenced guidance.

To give you a glance at the new standard, some visual excerpts are provided on this and the next page.

Construction Identification Sign with Sponsor Logos

Design and Construction Supervised by:



US Army Corps of Engineers
Los Angeles District



Expansion of Camp Pendleton Commissary

Sponsored by:



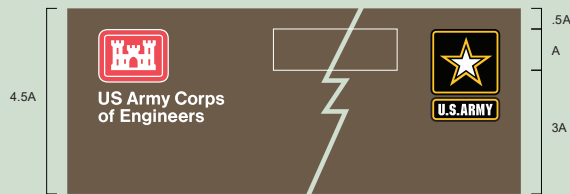
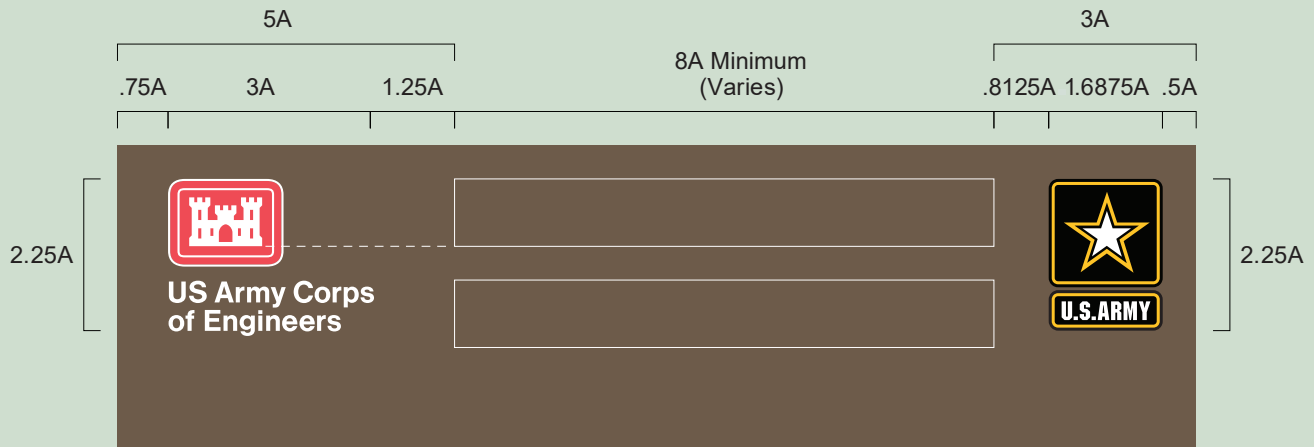

Contractor:
Alamitos Construction Co.
San Diego, California

Consulting Engineer:
Bernardino International
Engineering Company, Inc.
Riverside, California

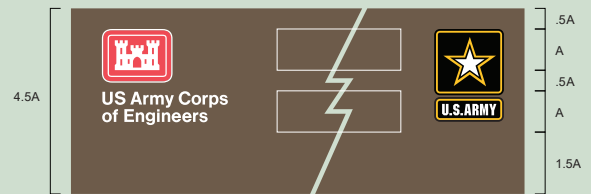
An example of the Construction Identification sign. Notice the Army star logo in the red vertical banner below the Corps signature. Adjustments were made to make room for logos of sponsoring and/or partnering entities.

For civil works project that do not have sponsoring entities, the space is filled with a text description of the project or facility as before. Consult the guidance found on the Gateway for more details.

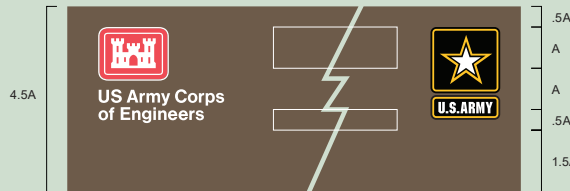
Standard Identification Sign with Army Star Logo



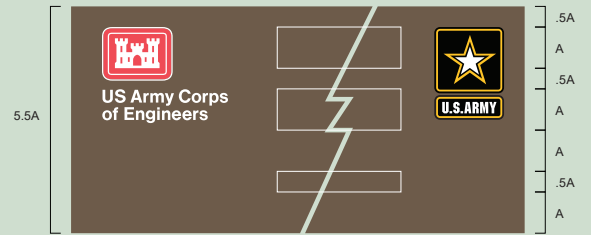
Grid 1-0
One line, primary legend
(No Secondary Legend)



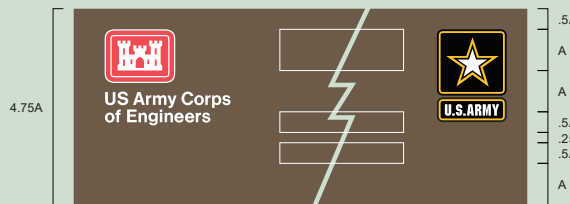
Grid 2-0
Two lines, primary legend
(No Secondary Legend)



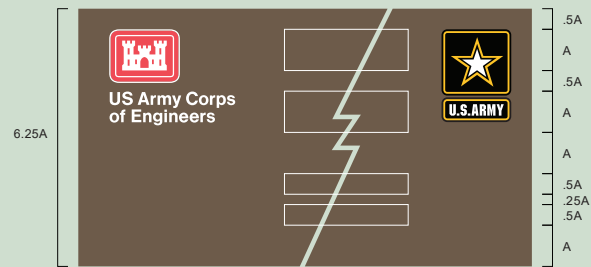
Grid 1-1
One line, primary legend
One line, secondary legend



Grid 2-1
Two lines, primary legend
One line, secondary legend



Grid 1-2
One line, primary legend
Two lines, secondary legend



Grid 2-2
Two lines, primary legend
Two lines, secondary legend

The Army star now appears on the right side of the Standard Identification sign. As stated in the referred memorandum, its new sign code is STANST. For further

information about the Standard Identification with an Army star, the complete memorandum can be found on the NRM gateway link referenced on page 2.

Call Before You Dig

AJ Jensen

National Sign Program Manager

As the new project Sign Program Manager (SPM), there's a lot to take in. There's a lot of room to make mistakes and correct them or refine your techniques. You will be responsible to oversee the installation of signs, whether you do it yourself or if you have a maintenance crew do it. Just don't forget to call before you dig.

First Day on the Job

Sign Program Manager Alex at my project was promoted to another district, so the boss assigned me as the new SPM. Before Alex left, he spent a couple of days training me how to install signs.

Using a tractor equipped with an auger attachment, Alex and I set-out to install a Project Roadway Directional sign along the shoulder of a county highway. With Alex in the tractor seat, he had me keep eyes on the one-foot diameter auger bit as he bore holes for sign posts. The bit spun and dug, freely removing rocks and soil.

Suddenly I saw something unusual, so I asked Alex to dismount the tractor and take a look. In the debris we saw what looked like tiny roots, but oddly there was no vegetation nearby that would produce a bundle of uniform roots like that. Upon closer look, we realized they were not roots; they were a big bundle of tiny communication-line wires. Alex immediately knew the problem—he had forgotten to call before digging.

With our heads hanging low, we told our boss, who laughed at us and told us to take care of it. We called the utility company, who sent a technician to splice the line. They billed the agency, and the repair wasn't cheap.

That chain of events was burned into my memory. It was all I needed as a new project SPM to always mark a site and call before digging.

Recent Example

My experience is not unique. Last year at a Corps dam, the maintenance team installed some drainage culverts. They relied on their memory to estimate the location of the Corps-owned fiber-optic lines installed a few years before. However, they were wrong, and during the installation, their backhoe ruptured the lines. This caused an extended outage. Tens of thousands of dollars were needlessly lost in labor and repair costs. This wouldn't have happened if they had called before they dug and consulted Corps installation schematic drawings.



Digging without calling first often leads to damaged utility lines

Avoiding Disaster

Calling before you dig is critical to public safety—including yours. A quick internet search will reveal several real-life examples of digging gone afoul when the digging teams unknowingly ruptured utility lines. Breaking a gas, electricity, sewer, water, or communication line always damages property and in some cases causes immediate serious injury or death. You also place financial and legal liability onto the Corps and yourself for negligence.

Plan Ahead

Calling 811 is a federally-designated call-before-you-dig number. It is how a single call dispatches the utility companies in the area to mark their existing lines before you break ground. It saves time, money, and lives. But there's work to do before the call.

Determine where you want to dig well in advance of your scheduled dig date. Clearly mark the proposed location(s). Use white marking paint and/or a series of white marking flags. White is the universally recognized color for "proposed excavation."

At each location where you intend to dig a hole, specify the widest perimeter of each proposed hole

with white marking paint. You're essentially drawing a solid or dashed line around where the hole is going to be.

A personal tip: When I mark the proposed locations for signs, I use white marking paint to designate an X where to post is to be. Then I draw a circle around the X, approximating how big around the hole will have to be to install the post (often, the deeper the hole, the bigger around it will have to be). If the sign requires two posts, I mark each hole accordingly and connect them with a dashed white line.

Making the Call

When you have adequately marked the sites where you intend to dig, call 811 or use the local web-based portal (search for it online if you wish). When you describe the area to the dispatcher (or type it out), provide the GPS coordinates and other relevant details. A description such as "This is located 180 feet east of XYZ intersection, 12 feet to the north of the paved surface, and has been tagged with white marking paint" will help technicians to easily find the dig site. They will use their color-coded paint to mark the location(s) of their utility line(s) so that you can see where it's safe to dig and where it isn't.

Marking at your proposed dig site(s) is often completed 2-3 working days after your call. However, some remote locations may take longer for the utility companies to get someone to mark the spot. Also, weekends and holidays should not be counted as work days. So if I call on Friday (Day 0), I know that Monday is Day 1 and Tuesday is Day 2, etc.

Even though in many areas you would be cleared to dig on Day 3, it is best to verify with the dispatcher at

the time of the initial call. Get the date it would be safe to proceed and avoid digging before then.

Utility Lines Managed by the Corps

In addition to calling 811, don't overlook underground utilities installed and managed by your local Corps project. In most cases, the Corps is not part of the OneCall system, so you'll have to find someone on project who has the drawing schematics and/or knowledge to mark where Corps utilities are.

Far too often, Corps maintenance crews/contractors rupture utility lines on Corps property, even when the local utility companies check for and mark their ownlines. Remember, they're only checking for the lines they are in charge of. For example, if Verizon provides high speed communication lines to the project, but the project has installed fiber-optic lines on project, Verizon will not mark the presence of the Corps' fiber-optic lines. That's the responsibility of the Corps.

There are individuals on Corps projects with knowledge and schematic drawings of Corps-owned utilities. Request that they

mark the underground utilities and ensure that they have finished doing it before you dig. If you find that they won't help you in a timely manner for whatever the reason, get your supervisor's help.

Assessing the Markings

As soon as you are "cleared for digging," visit the dig site. If you see different colors of paint near or on your white marked area, you'll know those are specific locations where you must not dig. Assess the markings and determine whether you are clear to dig as planned or if you need to move the sign to another

Uniform Color Code For Marking Underground Utilities	
Red	Electric
Orange	Communications
Yellow	Gas, Oil, Steam
Green	Sewer Drainage
Blue	Potable Water
Purple	Reclaimed Water
White	Proposed Excavation
Pink	Survey Marks

location. At any rate, be careful not to dig within 18 inches of any of those markings so as to avoid accidentally damaging them during the installation.

Each color in the marking system has a distinct universal meaning, as seen in the Uniform Color Code table.

In the event of a conflict between your proposed sign placement and underground utilities, you can use your judgment to make minor adjustments for a safe installation. However, if where you want to put the sign conflicts too much with the existing underground utilities, you will need to choose a new location and start the marking procedure and Call Before You Dig from the beginning.

Additional Considerations Beyond the Call

This article is meant to raise awareness of how important it is to call before you dig, especially to the new project Sign Program Manager. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive authority on all there is to know.

There are several other things to be aware of when digging. Find out whose property you are digging on.

If it is a county, state, or municipal road? If so, do you have permission to dig there? Is there a permitting process? Is it private land? Do you have written approval? Some of these issues may need to be cleared by the office of Real Estate in the district office.

Some areas have cultural resource considerations that prevent you from digging. Some locales require an erosion control plan.

Ensure that you conduct your risk assessments. Follow all safety protocols, including training on equipment and the use of personal protective equipment.

Reach out to other project SPMs who have experience installing signs. Keep your district SPM in the loop. Perhaps one of them might be willing to do a day visit and help you see the process through.

Be sure to go over your plans with your supervisor. He or she will help you avoid problematic situations that you otherwise wouldn't be aware of.

Good luck, and happy digging!



Arriving at the site after the utilities are marked will help you decide whether your dig location is safe or if you'll need to dig elsewhere

Purchasing Signs

AJ Jensen

National Sign Program Manager

Purchasing signs sounds like a simple thing to do, but there are several steps that must be followed in order to be successful. If you're new to purchasing signs, this article is written for you.

Preparing Your Order

Determine which signs you need to purchase. Design them in SignPro and put them into a sign order (also using SignPro). Then contact your district Sign Program Manager (SPM), reporting that you have

a sign order that needs to be approved. All of these steps must be followed, per regulation (EP 1130-2-500, Chapter 6). Sign purchases of any size must be approved by the district SPM prior to ordering.

Micro-Purchases

With the new micro-purchase threshold of \$10,000 (up from \$3,000) to make credit card purchases, it's easier to buy signs than before. Follow your project's standard operating procedures for micro-purchases.



Competition

For amounts above the micro-purchase threshold, follow your district's policy for purchasing. Ultimately, the Office of Contracting oversees purchasing in in the district. A Contracting Officer (KO) generally requires some kind of competition between vendors to determine who will make the signs. You will communicate the funding source to the KO. Keep your supervisor in the know, because most of the time sign funding comes from one of his or her budget lines.

If your order must be competed, UNICOR (Federal Prison Industries) must be given an opportunity to compete with the others, by requirement. The form of the competition is up to the KO, but you can discuss this with him or her. UNICOR touts its ability to meet or beat any comparable quote. The KO may choose to compare all of the quotes together along-side UNICOR's, or may choose to compare all the private contractors first and then send the low bid to UNICOR to see if they will offer a better price.

Compare apples to apples. The cheapest price is not always the best deal. Remember that UNICOR still places cut vinyl letters onto signs with the Corps brown background. Most other contractors will print their signs. Although printed signs are cheaper, they don't last as long as signs constructed with cut vinyl.

The Contracting Officer

Be respectful to KOs because they have a tightly scrutinized federal warrant. They juggle several regulations, including the FAR (Federal Acquisition Regulation), DFARS (Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement), NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act), and supplemental guidance and memorandums that the Corps releases from time to time. Contracting Officers have latitude to choose different purchasing options, but each carries risk and may conflict with another regulation. That's why they may be reluctant to choose the option you like best.

If you want to understand the purchasing procedure better, take the Fiscal Law course that's required to become a Contracting Officer Representative, or COR.

Receiving the Order

When the final shipment arrives, inspect it immediately for damage, quality, and accuracy. Take photos of any damage to packaging right off the bat and report them on the bill of lading. Inspect all signs to ensure each one has been completed to satisfaction. Document and report any discrepancies immediately to the fabricator. If you worked with a KO, report to them for the next steps to take.

It is a mistake to receive and order, allow payment on it, let the order sit for a year, and then open the packaging only to discover the signs were not made correctly or are damaged. By then it's too late.

Install and Document

When you are satisfied with the signs, install them and update SignPro. Ensure a photo of each sign appears with its SignPro entry as well.

Traffic Signs

Traffic signs (Stop, Do Not Enter, Speed Limit, Curve Ahead, etc.) as found in Section 9 of the *Sign Standards Manual* are easily purchased using the micro-purchase rules. Remember, all sign orders have to be approved by the district SPM. Be sure they meet the requirements of size, design, coloration, and reflectivity. Online retailers can provide traffic signs quickly and inexpensively.

Artwork & Fonts

The Corps Helvetica fonts are posted on the NRM Gateway in the Sign Project Management section. These are Corps owned and designed, so you may install them on your computer. The fabricator may also download and use these fonts in designing Corps signs, and is encouraged to do so.

Sign ordering may be simple or complicated. If you have trouble with SignPro, or if your contractor struggles designing a compliant sign, let me know. I can help with some of the custom signs so that they comply with official standards.

Editor's Note: The Sign Post is published periodically to supplement and clarify guidance issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and to offer tips and suggestions to Sign Program Managers nationwide. It does not replace official policy. If an error or conflict is found herein that contradicts official guidance, official guidance prevails. Sign-oriented articles from the field are welcome.