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The Sign Post

The Sign Program Newsletter
US Army Corps of Engineers

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In This Issue

Welcome again 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 contains significant information regarding the new standards set by the Federal Highway Administration for Directional signage. It is a quick peek into how those recent changes directly affect what we do here with the National Sign Program. There are also some articles talking about different aspects of the program. We hope they prove useful to you and your teams as you engage with them.

Each one of you contributes to making this program what it is. Thanks to all for their efforts and hard work!

Directional Signage—New Standards

New MUTCD changes that will affect our Manual

AJ Jensen, National Sign Program Manager

Throughout the years, the Corps has done a decent job at pushing its own signage for the purpose of looking distinct. Over the years, this approach has worked well for the entire Corps. Yes, it has differed from the signs offered by other agencies nationwide, but it has served the Corps of Engineers in a good way.

Recently, however, the Federal Highway Administration (FHwA), who is the national authority over publicly-accessible signs across the United States, has provided new guidance that we are required to integrate and follow closely.

We have to remember that certain signs of ours fall under their jurisdiction, which includes our directional signs (those with arrows) and our Parking/No Parking signs. The FHwA has specifically looked into Corps signs and has dictated that we must change our Directional signs and our Parking/No Parking signs to comply with its guidance. And so we make the changes.

First, Directional signs (to include our Approach Roadway Directional signs and our Project Roadway Directional signs) are to be formatted slightly different. They now have a 1/8*A* border all the way around the sign. Their font is the Highway Gothic font, which for these signs we must use. The arrow format has also changed to use the arrow style more familiar to arrows seen on highway signs.

Next, parking signs (including both "Parking signs" and "Prohibitive Parking signs") are to match the MUTCD in their formatting and font usage. Their borders are to change (to green or red) and the font is to change to their Highway Gothic font in order to be consistent with the Parking/No Parking signs seen throughout the rest of the nation.

The final change is the Corps Arrows. The arrows that the Corps has been using have changed to the style of arrows found in the MUTCD. Due to the type of usage by the Corps of Engineers, we have selected *Arrow D* and have adapted it for use on our signs. The older Corps arrows are still able to be used for certain applications, but most of the directional signage found throughout that the public generally uses has been changed appropriately.

The arrows are pictured below, just as they will be in the new Sign Standards Manual:



Arrows to be used on Directional signs

Making the Changes

Now, we all realize that changes are tough, and making them requires a bit of effort. At the National level, we have thought this through and have come up with a plan that will minimize additional cost and inconvenience.

So here's what: 1) *Serviceable signs presently standing are good to remain placed until they finish their useful service life.* If you have ordered signs already that are of the old standard, be sure to get them up quickly. They are part of your inventory. They are good to install and live their lives out. Again, you'll replace them when they have done their job and are no longer serviceable due to their age.

2) *Any signs ordered from the release date of the new Manual will need to comply with the direction of the new Sign Standards Manual.* So that means that you are good to order signs now and install them. Just remember that when the new *Sign Standards Manual* is published, that is the limit of when you can order the older signs and have them installed. After that point, all signs will need to be in conformity to the new standard.

This should minimize inconvenience, keeping it to a low. The signs will look different, but you can take comfort knowing that they will conform with the MUTCD and the new direction of the program.

New Typeface: Highway Gothic

With the Directional signs, there are some alterations that you will need to know. The first ting is the typeface. It used to be Helvetica Medium

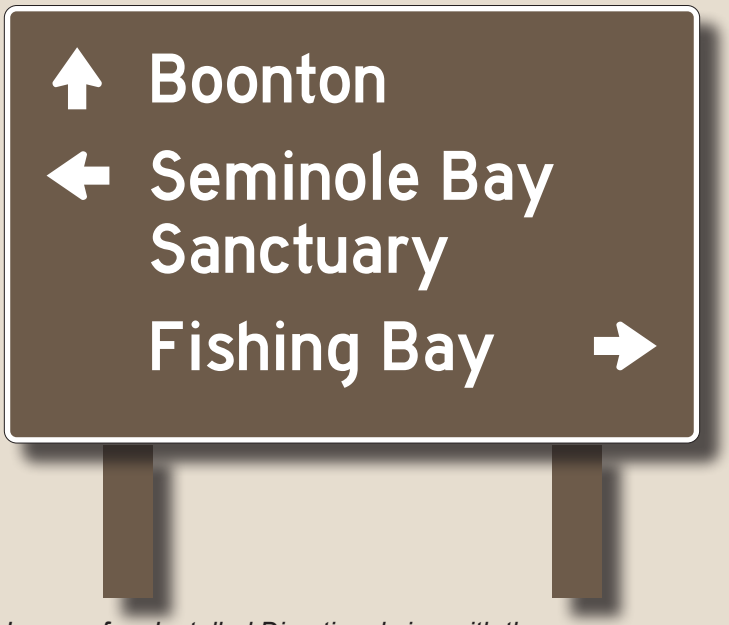


Image of an Installed Directional sign with the new formatting

that we used. On Directional signs, we are now required to use Highway Gothic. It is a little challenging to work with, but that's our requirement. Be patient, as it may take a little getting used to the different behaviors with this particular typeface. It's great, but it's not Helvetica Medium.

Border around the Sign

The next change includes having a border around the entire sign. If you remember, we used to have a border at the top and bottom of each sign. Now we outline the sign with a 1/8*A* border, all the way around. When calculating from the top edge of the sign to the text, the 1/8*A* measurement combines with the total space. In other words, from the outside of the top edge of the sign, if you calculate a measurement of *A*, then 7/8 of that will be space and 1/8 of that will be the outside white border.

It is recommended that on the bottom of the sign, the text be 1.5*A*. You are able to adjust the top and bottom margins from A to 1.5*A* to 2*A*. It is also permitted to adjust the righ and left margins by increasing them. The normal right and left margin is *A* (1/8*A* for the border, plus 7/8*A* for the vacant space). However, you are authorized to increase that up to 2*A*. Whatever the left margin is, the right margin will be the same.

Horizontal Separator Lines

A new addition to the Directional signs includes the option to place a horizontal separator line to separate destinations. This is a common attribute of many of the signs you will see on highways. We now have that option.

As you do so, remember to use your vertical spacing appropriately. In the example, notice how the "Day Park" destination has the distance A above it and and *A* distance below. And with each following destination, each rests the distance *A* preceding and *A* following as well. The final destination has the distance 1.5*A* after it. Just remember that the final distance may be changed to *A* or1.5*A*. This example has a 1.5*A* distance, just for your ability to notice and compare.

In this particular example, you see that there are mileage markers on it. Mileage markers are not required. However, if used, they are right justified unless there is an arrow on the right. Place the measurement of 2*A* from the widest distance (in this case it's a 2). Place measurements, and you're done.



Optional horizontal separator lines are used to separate destinations

Multiple Justification of Legend

Another change is the spacing with destinations on signs with two or more arrows pointing in opposite directions. In the sign below, notice how the *Boonton Lake* is forward, while *Campground* is to the forward right.



"Collapsed" format for multi-directional signs. Reducing the space to the right and left is optional.

This is another option that you may choose that would possibly save your project a little bit of money due to a shortened sign (less aluminum equals lower price). Notice *Boonton Lake* above with the forward arrow. Compare its length with the length of *Campground*. *Boonton Lake* is longer,

so its length will be used as the predominant length. Place *Campground* below it. Then adjust the arrows to the left and right margins. You will see that *Boonton Lake* is spaced normally. Then *Campground* has slightly more space to the arrow, because the arrow is right-justified.

Even though there are the optional horizontal lines in this particular example, horizontal lines are not required on this type of sign.

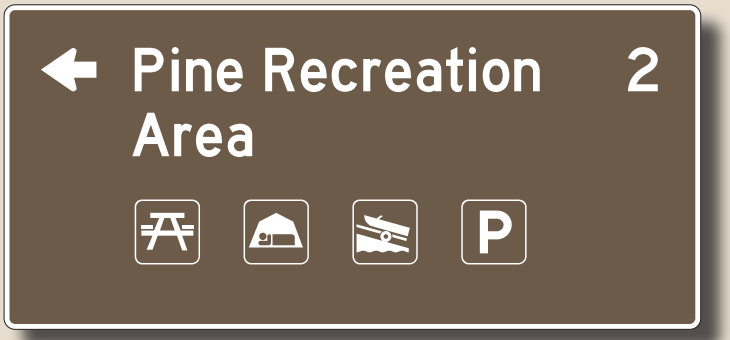
Directional Symbol Sign

The guidance for this particular type of sign is pretty similar to what it has always been. The requirements for spacing and placement remain consistent with what we've always been doing with them.

However, there are a couple of changes that you will need to be aware of in order to have a sign compliant with the new standard.

Signs are designed for 3 or 4 symbols. When there are 3 symbols, the symbols are 2*A* tall, and when there are 4 symbols, they are 1.5*A* tall, just like it's been done for years in the Sign Program.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHwA) requires symbols to be a certain height. This means that smaller signs, such as 3A or 4A, do not meet this requirement. The symbol must equal 8



Directional Symbol sign with mileage marker

inches tall or taller. Be sure to make the symbols that high, because they can be no smaller.

All Directional signs will be installed as before. Mounting height will remain consistent with what it has always been. Additionally, the sign posts and everything about them will remain the same.

Sign Posts

Regarding the sign posts, the guidance is the following: Whatever the size of the letters, that is the width of the sign post. So a 4-inch legend will be installed with 3 or 4-inch signs. A 6-inch legend will require 6 x 8-inch posts. Install the 6-inch side of the post with the face of the sign (and the 8-inch length will go behind the sign).

Ideally, a 9-inch sign will be supported by a 9 x 12 with the 9-inch side facing the sign and the 12-inch side going behind the sign. However, it is acceptable to use 8 x 8 lumber on a sign with a 9-inch legend. A 12-inch legend will use lumber with the demension of 12 x 12. A sign of this dimension will be very rare.

And of course, don't forget to space the sign posts 2*A* in from the outside edge of the signs. This still remains a standard by which we install Directional signs. And naturally, the need to stain the sign posts with our Corps brown paint will be left unchanged.

Also note, that with the directional signs, we still offer 3", 4", 6", 9", and on some occasions 12" (as mentioned above) for letter height. Corps standards for how to calculate legend size based on the highway speed remain unchanged and are in full force. Please note that you may increase these special measurements depending on your specific need. Remember that these measurements are the minimum amount of space allowed. It is *recommended* that for visual clarity, the bottom measurement be 1.5*A* minimum; you will be glad to have placed a greater amount at the bottom. You are at liberty to increase these measurements. A distance of .5*A* is placed between lines in a multiline destination. The space between individual destinations is also *A*, but you may increase it to 1.5*A* if you choose.

This system allows for many more spacing options while maintaining a consistent appearance. The intent of the changes on the Directional signs is to *provide flexibility* within the set of rules that we all have to follow.

Parking and No Parking Signs

Regarding the Parking/No Parking signs, even though their format has slightly changed, they will still be posted as they are now. The signs will be installed with the same professionalism that you have always posted them.

The posts will still need to be stained. And remember that painting the reverse of those signs may not be required, but is permitted and will certainly provide benefit.



The Parking/No Parking signs have minimal changes. The typeface as we remember it was once Helvetica bold, and was mixed case (with a capital letter beginning each word). The format has changed to Highway Gothic, with all capital letters. This is one of the few times where all capital letters is permitted.

Additionally, the wording is centered. The wording is also the color of green for Parking signs and red for No Parking signs. Finally, the last change is the color of the outline. The color of the outline, instead of black as it was before, now matches the circle surrounding the letter P. It nicely matches the color of the text. Perhaps you will recognize this sign format from your local community. At any rate, these signs are ready for you to prepare and use.

You may be interested to know that the text size may vary a little bit. Normally, with Corps signs, we expect the text size to match a specific size allocation. The same goes with these Parking/No Parking signs, but there is flexibility.



What does that mean? It means that if the text size is a little too big to fit in the required spot (which happens because the letters are all capital), then the text size may be reduced slightly to allow the legend to fit the sign.

Remember that when you install these signs, as before, you will want to place them based on actual need. Of course, that is a requirement for all of the signs we install throughout the Sign Program!



If you have questions about any of this material, or if I have left any of you in doubt, be sure to contact your district Sign Program Manager.

I am also available to answer questions if and when needed. I am happy to provide guidance when needed and to encourage sign managers to use the resources provided by the Sign Program.

Improvements to Be Made

Tricks to help all Sign Program Managers

AJ Jensen, National Sign Program Manager

The Sign Standards Program has been operating a long while now. It has been operational since most of us even entered the work force. Since those early days of the program, there have been many changes, some of which have come through memorandums, and some of which have come when policy changes. There are reasons for each change that comes through. The key to be successful is to pay close attention to the program that changes.

Most of the changes are easily incorporated. Others are a bit of a challenge to implement. But no matter how the changes come, we are all able to carry them out to improve our individual programs.

After having spoken with Rangers in the field several times, I have noticed that there are some improvements that each one of you could make to your individual programs. I have listed some of them below for you to consider. Please give some of them a try to let us know how they work out.

Breakaway Holes

These are holes that you drill into the sign posts to allow them to break away when struck by a moving vehicle. A normal Stop sign doesn't need them because a 30" sign is placed on a 4" x 4" post, which is considered a breakaway post. However, signs mounted on posts that are 4" x 6" or larger should have breakaway holes drilled through them.

On each post, drill one hole perpendicular to the traveled surface. In other words, I'm scooting along in my nice little sportscar and see the sign. But I don't see any breakaway holes on the sign. However, if I stop my vehicle right along-side the sign, then I will see the holes because they are drilled perpendicular to the traffic.

To make the holes, get a nice drill bit and drill at ground level (sideways, or course). Drill all the way through the sign post. Then you will need a second hole 18" above the ground. Center that bit and drill all the way through the post, sideways. And that's it. At this point, you are done with this process.



Breakaway holes on a sign post. Notice there is one hole at the ground level and another 18 inches above. This is the side view. The post is 4 x 6 inches. The 4-inch side is attached to the sign. The holes are on the 6-inch side.

Now, if the sign posts are cordoned-off by railing, or if they are inaccessible to a crash (due to them being behind a highway barrier), then the holes are not necessary. But in the cases where the holes should be there, they will generally make a difference to a vehicle that strikes them.

Using L-Irons

Many people have had problems with a ground crew using the Weed Whacker on sign posts. After a while, the sign posts become weathered, and

with their structural damage they begin to become weak.

Some Rangers have begun to use L-irons around the base of their signs. Most L-irons are



Notice the L-Iron supporting the post. For years, this post had no L-Iron on it. Now the L-Iron keeps the sign up.

metal. When they are screwed to the base of sign posts, they protect the sign post from "weed eating activity." They cost little, but those who have placed them assure me that they're worth it.

Staining Sign Posts

For people to stain their sign posts, they report positive feedback. Staining sign posts is not a required procedure, but it used to be.It really makes a positive difference to a sign program. Staining the posts causes the posts to become more subdued. Blemishes in the wood are covered by the stain. Be sure to use Corps Brown. If you need help selecting the proper color, notify your district Sign Program Manager, who has a color swatch of the Corps Brown color. If needed, contact the National Sign Program Manager for assistance.

Painting Signs

Well, actually, just the backs. Painting the reverse side of signs Corps Brown reduces the shiny aspect of sign backs. But it does more than just this. It mellows the tone of the reverse of the



Painting the back of the sign and staining the sign post make a big difference when presenting signs.

sign, and creates a warm feeling for the visitor.

This is important. Signs, as you know are important. By painting and maintaining their reverse side a nice Corps Brown, along with having the posts stained Corps Brown, you show a professional feeling to a park or facility. The thing is that people remember that signs were painted on the reverse. People actually do like nice facili-

ties, and when people like the facilities, they keep them cleaner.

Cost Tracking

Keeping track of how much a sign costs is more than just its sticker price. The total cost of installing a sign begins with the time you spend to order it. Then the sticker price. But then you have to pay for the sign's installation, both with labor hours and incidental equipment. And if other people help you install it, you need to calculate their labor hours as well.

This is a critical aspect of the program because what you keep track of now will greatly help you manage future jobs much more accurately. And it will help others outside your district to make more accurate guesses for their Sign Programs, as well.

Summary

All in all, there are several improvements that a Sign Program Manager could make to improve the Sign Program at many levels. The key here is to pay attention and be willing to make changes that will impact your individual Sign Program for years to come, even after you leave the force.

So pay attention to discussions about signs. Network with other Rangers who have sign duties on their respective projects. Visit those other projects and provide positive feedback to their Sign Program Managers. Be willing to host others to visit your project and perform the same duties.

Don't be "ashamed" of your individual program, because we are public servants with a charge to deliver. Engage actively, and you'll see many reasons why being part of the sign group really pays off. And it will pay off!

Sign Mapper

For the new and improved Sign Program

AJ Jensen, National Sign Program Manager

Problems with SignPro

During the last couple of years, managing the affairs of the Sign Program have been difficult for a program manager. Of course, you know this very well.

SignPro was a great tool for each of you, and it was powerful. But it had its limitations. I know that as the National Sign Program Manager, I tried a number of potential solutions to get SignPro running as it was originally intended. Sadly, defeat after defeat (mostly due to the layers of network restrictions we faced), we were beaten back each time.

Then, of course, many of you remember about 2021 when SignPro was finally dealt a mortal blow. Due to the fact that QuickTime was now a program that was no longer supported by Apple, we had to find a new solution to take care of our sign inventory issues.

I traveled to meet the designer of SignPro back in 2021, along with SAWG Chairman Jeff Mangum. Jeff and I tested SignPro out on the designer's machine, and it worked! However, when we tried it on our network it failed because the network no longer supported QuickTime. We were a bit disappointed, but that's where SignPro was. And there was no replacement. So we were out of luck.

A Potential Solution

When I deployed in 2022, my replacement Keith Hyde had the idea to approach some CWBI individuals, which was perfect. Keith made excellent progress rebuilding what SignPro had and guided the process with each step. When I returned to the States, I found that Keith and others had the program well developed, which was a terrific surprise for me.

During the next several months, we reviewed and improved the program. We found that by

working and operating under the CWBI umbrella was much easier. With CWBI's technicians contracted to help us out, we were able to overcome many of the obstacles that we had faced.

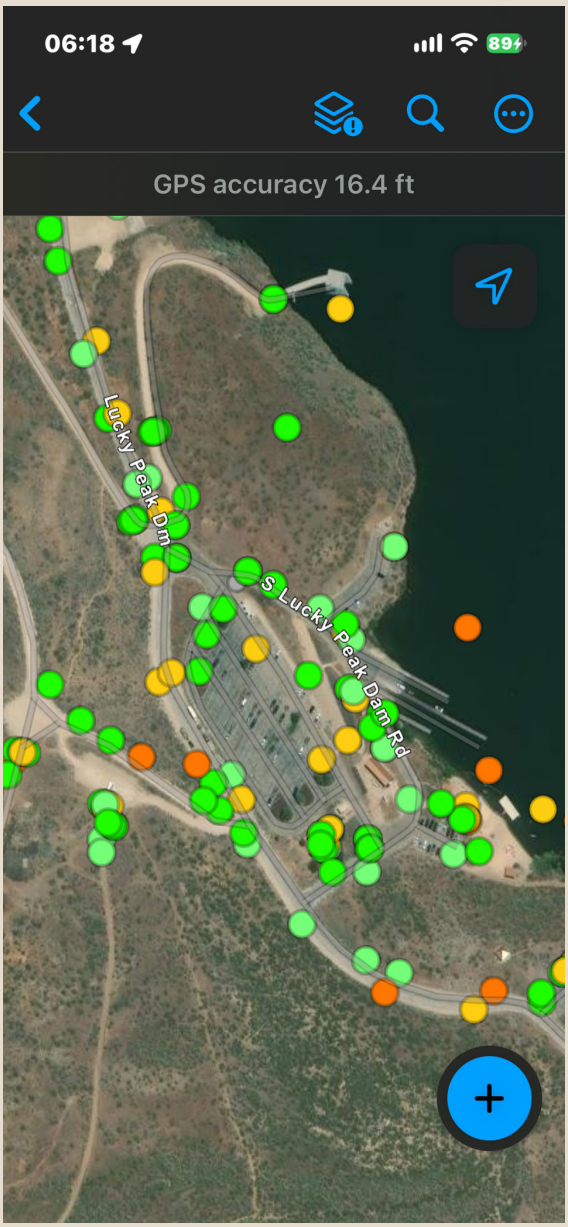
A big obstacle that we had to overcome was the ability to access this program through mobile phones and networked tablet devices. Did it work? You betcha! This became a working part of Sign Mapper.

What is Sign Mapper?

Sign Mapper is a field tool used to document signs, their locations, and their condition. It places signs onto a map. It allows people to manipulate data in many amazing ways and to be able to call on that data later on.

Among the cool things about Sign Mapper is using it with handheld devices to access the network. In other words, you can use an iPhone to document each sign, and even take a photo or two for archival reference. You can adjust the location of a sign if needed, and Sign Mapper will record its new location immediately.

Many of the things about digitally managing the Sign Standards Program remain the same as they were under SignPro. However, with Sign Mapper, you have far more access to manage and manipulate data than you did before. You can perform large sweeps of information that affect multiple signs in the program and change them very quickly. You are going to want to access this application soon because it includes the tools your Sign Program needs to be successful.



An image of Sign Mapper using the cell phone

Shortcomings

Sign Mapper really is great, but it does have a limitation. It doesn't provide a catalog like SignPro did. Designing and ordering signs is a little more complicated. We intend to develop tools through AI to make up for that particular aspect so that ordering signs will be much easier and will be more effective.

Another issue that we are working through is getting Sign Mapper up on everyone's radar. Each person using Sign Mapper is required to get an account. Each account needs to be linked with each person's work phone. While many are in fact linked-in, the majority in the Corps at this time are not linked-in.

Assessment

Sign Mapper is well worth the effort to set-up on your computer. For assistance, be sure to e-mail *DLL-NWK-SignMapperHelp@usace.army.mil.* The Sign Mapper team will include you and you will be provided access to the program. There are also webinars that can be accessed through the SharePoint site, so be sure to watch those. Finally, you are at liberty to reach out to any of us at any time for access.

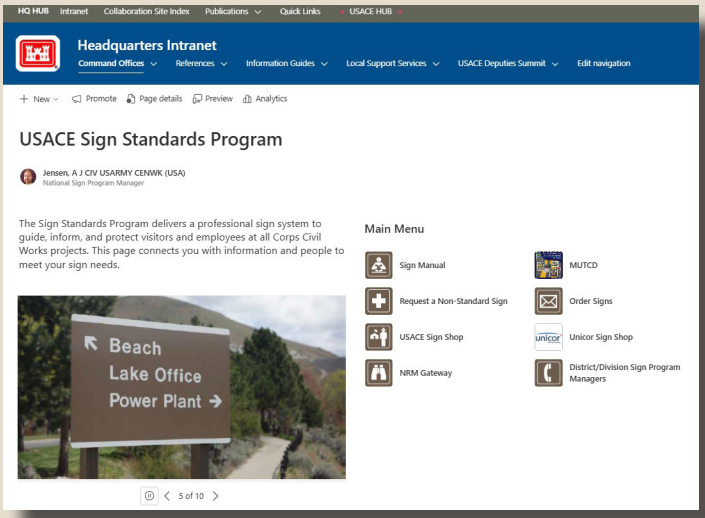
Network Access

Using SharePoint as a resource

AJ Jensen, National Sign Program Manager

The Sign Advisory Work Group (SAWG) and I have put together some great resources for each Sign Program Manager to take advantage of. Each addition that we have placed in there exists so that each one of you can have an increased ablility to find useful resources that will improve your program.

As you likely know, there is the Sign Program page on the Gateway. That is found by clicking *corpslakes.erdc.dren.mil/employees/sign/sign.cfm*. This is a network webpage useful to any particular Corps Sign Program manager to not only get started up, but even includes advanced tools to build your Sign Program. It has Policies and Procedures, a little training module, and includes Corps contacts who are responsible for you and your program. It also includes the Sign Standards Manual, current events, and so on.



A peek at the Sign Program's SharePoint website, located on the Headquarters Internet page.

SharePoint Site

While this is all great, there is another website that I would like to direct you to as well. It is on the SharePoint drive. It is additional information that you and your program will want to include when making decisions regarding the Sign Program in your local area. The link for this is found on the main Sign Program page under the link "Sign Standards Program SharePoint." Click there and you will find more resources for the Sign Standards Program.

The Sign Program SharePoint site includes some of the same resources as the Gateway. However, it also includes links to training modules (webinars) that have been presented. It also includes information about SignMapper (the replacement to SignPro). However, one nice thig about the SharePoint site is its listing of different materials that the Sign Advisory Work Group and I (the National Sign Program Manager) have been working on. We felt these resources so important that we are sharing them for all to access (as long as you are a Corps employee, that is). Yes, it duplicates much of what is found on the Gateway, but it does include the webinars, which are key to managing the program.

Another nice thing about the Sign Program SharePoint site is its use of a Library at the bottom of the page. The Library contains Fonts, Forms, Guidance, Policy Memos, Sign Artwork, the Sign Manual, and information about the Webinars pertaining to the Sign Program. As we further develop the Library, it will become a better place to visit for all Sign Program needs that a Sign Program Manager may have.

Future Direction

The Sign Program SharePoint site has a number of duplicate functions as the Sign Program Gateway site. At this point, most of us use both to take care of everything that the Sign Program has to offer. However, as time proceeds, most of the action in the Sign Program will come from the SharePoint site.

Stay tuned to the content of the SharePoint and you'll see some impressive changes that we can all use and enjoy!