

## DISTRICT OFFICES



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Frequently Asked Questions

## SPEED LIMITS



# SPEED LIMITS:

Why do we need them?  
How are they set?



## Why do we have speed limits?

**Safe and prudent for the conditions.** That's the rule of thumb. The posted limit is a maximum speed when there are no obstacles or distractions, and the pavement is dry. However, speed-limit signs cannot replace common sense.



Speed limits are intended to supplement the driver's judgment in determining what is a reasonable speed for particular road and weather conditions. Limits are imposed to assist Idaho law enforcement. They encourage better traffic flow by reducing the variances in speed.

Traffic limits that reflect the behavior of the majority of motorists are the most successful. Laws arbitrarily restricting the majority of drivers encourage wholesale violations, lack

public support, and generally fail to produce desirable changes in driving behavior.

## How are speed limits determined?

In accordance with federal guidelines, ITD uses the 85th percentile speed of free-flowing traffic to determine a safe and reasonable speed for a given road section. Traffic engineers set the limit at the speed at which 85 percent of the traffic is driving. This reflects the safe speed as determined by a large majority of drivers. According to research, accident involvement is the lowest within that 85 percent.

Speed limits are also determined by a combination of engineering and traffic investigations.



The engineering investigation involves determining the design of the road and its immediate environment. Engineers analyze items such as lane width, pavement type and condition of the road. They also look at terrain, parking conditions, residential development along the road and the number, width and types of entrances and intersecting streets.

The traffic investigation involves gathering and analyzing traffic-related data such as traffic volumes, accident frequency, and the effect of traffic-control devices such as stoplights and stop signs. After all variables have been considered and a speed limit is established, traffic should flow at a safe and efficient level.

## Does reducing a speed limit result in safer driving conditions?

Not necessarily. Reducing the limit below the warranted speed can actually be hazardous and unsafe.

Studies have shown that merely reducing a speed limit has little effect on the speed at which motorists will travel. Enforcement of the speed limit by the law-enforcement community is essential. Furthermore, no published research findings have established any direct relationship between posted speed limits and accident frequency.

When determining speed limits, engineers attempt to set a realistic limit that the majority of drivers will obey and that can be reasonably enforced.

