

A Border Surrounding A Warning Sign Affects Looking Behavior: A Field Observational Study

Michael S. Wogalter

*Department of Psychology
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-7801*

Raheel Rashid

*Department of Industrial Engineering
State University of New York - Buffalo
Buffalo, NY 14260-2050*

Most research examining the kinds of features that perceptually enhance warning signs and labels are conducted in laboratory settings using indirect measures of attention gettingness (noticeability), usually by employing subjective preference and memory tests. A more direct, ecologically valid measure of visual attention is whether or not a person is seen noticing the warning and the amount of time spent examining it, or in other words, their looking behavior. The present study examined whether adding a rectangular border around the warning text would improve the warning sign's salience as measured by two indicators of looking behavior in a field observational experiment. Six conditions were tested. In four, warning text was surrounded by one of four different borders (thick red, thick yellow/black alternating stripes, thin red, or thin black). The two control conditions were warning text with no border and no warning text/no border. The signs were individually posted in a university campus building and over 1200 people were observed on whether or not they looked at the sign and the amount of time they spent examining it. The results show that signs with thick red and thick yellow/black diagonal stripes were noticed more frequently and examined for longer periods of time than signs with thin or no borders. Implications for future testing warning salience are described.