

April 7, 2005

Refer to: HOTO-1

Mr. Dennis McCarthy  
Acting Director, Office of Climate  
Water and Weather Services  
National Weather Service, Room 14348  
1325 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. McCarthy:

The loss of life on the Nation's roadways due to flooding constitutes a problem that both the transportation and meteorological communities must address. To that end, we applaud your efforts under the "Flood Safety Awareness" program, especially the "Turn Around, Don't Drown" campaign. We also recognize that the National Weather Service (NWS) is the primary source of weather data, forecasts and warnings, and it is clear that such services save lives. However, we also know that getting timely, accurate and relevant information to drivers to avoid flood hazards is a responsibility of the transportation community too. To that end, we encourage State and local agencies to use uniform, consistent signing as an effective way to affect driver behavior.

Within the transportation community, a flooded road is considered an "incident"—an unplanned event that disrupts the normal operations of a roadway. There are two federal documents that provide guidance to State and local agencies regarding the types of signs that should be posted during such incidents as a flooded road—the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and the Standard Highway Signs (SHS) book. These documents contain the specifications for incident warning signs, which includes size of the legend, colors, and shape. To that end, we recommend that State and local highway agencies should warn motorists of temporary flooding conditions by using signs that are fluorescent pink (Pantone color 232 or RGB values 255:40:140) with black lettering, as defined for all incident warning signs in MUTCD Chapter 6I and illustrated in Figure 6I-1. Sign legends used should be specific to the roadway condition and clearly communicate the actions expected of the road users. Legends such as "Flooding Ahead" and "Turn Around, Don't Drown" could effectively communicate the desired warning and action. Further guidance contained in the MUTCD and SHS book can be found at: <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov>.

In closing, I would again like to praise the work of you and your staff, and look forward to working with you on this important subject.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Regina McElroy

Regina S. McElroy  
Director, Office of Transportation  
Operations