



SIGN ORDINANCE LIMITS

Questions And Answers

What are local sign laws?

Sign laws are a way for a local government to control the number, size, placement, and type of signs in a community. For example, communities can ban sandwich board signs or limit storefront window signs. Every city or county has a sign law, which is usually part of the larger zoning law.

How do sign laws apply to tobacco advertising?

If a community enacts or enforces strict limits on signs at retail outlets, this can lead to a reduction in tobacco advertising. Since tobacco is one of the most heavily advertised products at stores, a limit on storefront signs of all types can cut down on the amount of tobacco advertising at stores.

Are there any signage laws in California?

Current state law provides that no more than one-third of the square footage of windows and doors (e.g., glass) of an alcohol retailer may have advertising signs of any sort. This includes any type of advertisement. (CA Business & Professions Code section 25612.5(c)(7)). Many cities and counties have stricter sign ordinances. For example, the City of Los Angeles limits storefront signs to no more than 10% of the window.

What are the benefits of a signage law?

- Because of the *Lorillard v. Reilly* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, local governments face legal barriers in passing laws specifically to limit tobacco advertising. The benefit of a general sign law is that it can limit advertising of *all* types, e.g., tobacco, alcohol, candy.
- Tobacco control advocates can find allies in passing strict local sign laws among those concerned with alcohol advertising, public safety, and neighborhood blight.
- Improves public safety by helping to ensure that police can see inside a store if a robbery is taking place.
- Improves community appearance by reducing advertising clutter.

What type of arguments might I hear in trying to pass or enforce signage laws?

- 1) *Signage laws limit First Amendment rights of storeowners.*
 - Passing and enforcing sign laws has more to do with the public's health and safety than with the right to free speech. Strict sign laws still allow retailers to advertise their products, they just have to do so in a way that is safe and creates a positive image for the neighborhood.
 - California law already restricts storefront advertising to cover no more than one-third of exterior windows at retailers selling liquor.
 - Covering storefront windows with advertising is both ugly and dangerous. They obstruct the view of law enforcement when policing retail establishments.
 - On-the-street sandwich boards can be dangerous to pedestrians and cause accidents.
 - Littering our communities with in-your-face advertising including sidewalk "sandwich" boards and large neon signs is unattractive.