

SIGNS GUIDANCE FOR FARMERS AND OTHER LAND MANAGERS

**Using signs to inform the public about your
day-to-day land management operations**

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SECTION 1

Introduction

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives everyone a right of responsible access to most land and inland water in Scotland. The Act is underpinned by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code ('the Code'), which provides detailed guidance on the rights and responsibilities of countryside users and land managers. The purpose of this document is to advise and reassure land managers (farmers, crofters, estate factors etc.) on when, where and how to use appropriate and effective signage in accordance with the Act and Code. Its purpose is therefore limited and specific. It does not cover signage intended for waymarking or promoting visitor facilities and infrastructure, and it is not meant in any way to replace existing Health & Safety obligations and guidance.

1. Planning for access

- Signs can help you meet your responsibilities under the new legislation. They can direct people away from sensitive areas, help them find the best route, provide information on their responsibilities or warn about potential hazards. Of course, lots of people enjoy the countryside without land managers needing to communicate with them. But where you do have to manage land and water for access then signs can be a useful tool.
- They're not the only answer, however; they're just one of the options available to you. The best approach for getting your message across will depend on the site, the sort of information you're communicating and the levels of recreational use.
- One of the best ways to manage for access is to provide paths and tracks so that you integrate access with land management. Most people prefer to walk or ride along paths and tracks rather than go across fields or along roads. Having access routes across your land will also mean you have a better idea of where people are likely to be.
- Other ways you could manage for access positively would be to plan your work, wherever possible, to avoid the times when, and places where, people are most likely to be on your land.
- There are also ways of managing for people that can support or take the place of on-site signage. If you get a lot of visitors then you could work with others to provide information off-site in a local information centre / public buildings or face-to-face, and consider using local leaflets, ranger services and/or websites.
- If you have a recurring problem, then it might be better looking for a wider visitor management solution rather than continuing with signage that isn't working. You could contact your local authority or national park authority access officer to see if he/she can help – you'll find contact details for them on the website www.outdooraccess-scotland.com.

- It's important to look at all the options that might influence visitors to follow your advice if you're to manage for access successfully. Certainly, putting up too many signs will dilute the important messages and people may end up ignoring them altogether. Oversigning can also confuse people and spoil the attraction of the countryside.

Key points

Signs are not the only way of managing for access across your land. You should consider other options, such as:

- **providing paths and tracks;**
- **planning your work, wherever possible, to avoid the times when, and places where, people are most likely to be on your land;**
- **working with local authorities and others to develop wider management solutions for recurring problems.**

Avoid oversigning as it will dilute your message and confuse people.

2. When are signs needed?

- The Code advises the public that they have a responsibility to help land managers and others to work safely and effectively by:
 - keeping a safe distance and following any reasonable advice from the land manager so as not to hinder operations;
 - following any precautions taken or reasonable recommendations made by the land manager, such as avoiding an area or route when hazardous operations are under way;
 - checking to see what alternatives there are, such as neighbouring land, before entering a field of animals;
 - not causing damage to crops by opting to use paths or tracks, going round field margins, going on unsown ground or considering other routes on neighbouring ground.
- You need to manage your land or water responsibly for access, taking proper account of the interests of people exercising their access rights. The Code states that it's a land manager's responsibility to act reasonably when asking people to avoid land management operations by:
 - asking people, if you have an opportunity to do so, to follow a particular route;
 - taking precautions, such as asking people to avoid using a particular route or area, or avoid a particular activity, where there are significant risks or hazards that aren't obvious;
 - keeping any precautions to the minimum area and duration required to safeguard people's safety;
 - telling the public, especially if levels of public access are high or the operation is particularly dangerous, about precautions at any obvious access points (such as car parks and gates).
- With these principles in mind, you wouldn't normally need signage for these activities:

- ploughing, sowing and harvesting crops;
- planting trees and hedges;
- putting up fences, hedges and gates;
- routine maintenance and repairs on reservoirs or water intakes;
- dredging in rivers and lochs.

You'll be visible when carrying out these tasks and they will only create very localised and obvious hazards or last a short time. In these circumstances, the Code advises the public to proceed carefully, keep a safe distance and follow any reasonable advice from the land manager.

- By law, land managers must take reasonably practicable steps to ensure the public is not put at risk by their work. The Code advises that in order to carry out your work safely and effectively you need to consider signage in the following situations:
 - where the hazard raises significant risks (such as tree felling) or isn't obvious to the public;
 - where the hazard lasts longer than the time it takes you to complete the work (for instance, spreading slurry in areas frequently used by visitors);
 - where the public might not be sure what you want them to do to avoid a situation (for example, at a farmyard where visitors may have several choices but you have a preferred option for operational reasons).

Signs should be restricted to the minimum area and time required to allow the work to be carried out safely and effectively.

- Standard safety signs are available from other sources for situations covered by Health & Safety regulations, such as forest operations, crop spraying or warnings about bulls. This document does not deal with these situations and you should therefore continue to use the existing range of approved Health & Safety signage.
- Land managers have traditionally relied on signage with behavioural messages like 'Please leave gates as you find them' and 'Take your litter home'. These 'nag' signs are already extensively used and will continue to have a role in managing for access.

Key points

You don't need to put up signs for every job. Use them to ensure the public are not put at risk and to allow you to work safely and effectively. In particular, use signs:

- **where the hazard raises significant risks or isn't obvious;**
- **where the hazard lasts longer than the time it takes you to complete the work;**
- **where the public might not be sure what you want them to do to avoid a situation.**

If you currently use standard approved Health & Safety signs, then you should continue to do so.

3. Making your signs helpful and effective

- It's important that the wording and requested actions you use on signs are in keeping with the Code. Local authorities can take action against land managers who put up signs that obstruct access rights or put people off using the countryside responsibly.
- People naturally want to feel welcome in the countryside and respond best to helpful information. A positive approach to paths and tracks, and to informing the public about land management operations, will go a long way towards minimising problems and encouraging responsible attitudes.
- Helpful signs (see templates) have the following key points:
 - the activity/hazard that visitors need to be aware of;
 - the area affected;
 - how long the activity/hazard will last;
 - the action you're asking people to take and the reason for it;
 - your contact details for anyone wanting to get in touch;
 - thanks.
- Studies show that the public take more notice of a sign that gives the reason for a request. Providing a reason will also help to educate people in the longer term, as some irresponsible behaviour in the countryside is undoubtedly due to a lack of knowledge of farming practices.
- When you're describing the boundaries of the area affected you should try to use identifiable features on the ground – such as a stream, wall, gate or fence – or provide a precise distance if there's no clear feature.
- For your signs to be effective they need to be seen by as many people as possible at the most appropriate location. This means either warning people about circumstances in advance or alerting the public nearer to, or at, the activity or hazard. Occasionally, both may be needed.
- Remember to take down signs as soon as the activity is finished or the hazard is no longer present. This will minimise disruption to the public, maximise the power of the message and reduce visual impact on the landscape.
- By using helpful and effective signs – and only where and when needed – you're much more likely to get the public to comply with your request.

Key points

For your signs to be helpful and effective they need to be positive, provide a reason for any requested action and be well positioned. They should include:

- **information about the land management operation;**
- **its location;**
- **its duration;**
- **what you'd like the public to do and the reason for it;**
- **your contact details.**

Remember to take down signs as soon as the activity is finished or the hazard is no longer present.

SECTION 2

This section picks up on some of the points made earlier and looks at them in greater detail.

1. Where to locate your signs

- Basically, there are two options: in-advance or at-site of the activity. For in-advance signing, you'll need to make a judgement on whether it will be helpful to the public. The big advantage is that you can notify people of a risk before they come to it. For instance, a preliminary warning may alert an adult in case children under their supervision run ahead and reach the hazard unaccompanied. These signs can also be placed so that people have a chance to decide on alternative routes rather than having to turn back or retrace their steps. If you help people in this way you stand more chance of them complying with your request.
- At-site signage is located beside or within view of the hazard or land management activity, and alerts or reminds people of the need to take care. For example, a message asking the public not to take dogs into a field where sheep are lambing would be best placed at the entrance to the lambing field. This means the information is presented at the critical location and you're not relying on people remembering messages introduced earlier in their visit.
- Where you want to inform or warn people who are crossing land rather than using paths or tracks, you should put up signs at regular access points such as car parks and gates.

Key points

There are two options to consider when locating signs – they can either be in-advance or at-site.

- **In-advance signs allow you to warn people of a risk before they come to it and give visitors the chance to decide on alternative routes before reaching the hazard or activity.**
- **At-site signs provide the public with information when they reach the hazard or activity. This means you're not relying on people remembering messages introduced earlier in their visit.**

Where people are crossing land rather than using paths or tracks, locate your signs at regular access points.

2. Where and how to place signs

- Signs need to be carefully placed so that people can get close enough to read them. Some 15-20% of the UK public have a disability such as reduced eyesight or limited mobility. You therefore need to take care that visitors can access your sign without difficulty and ensure that they can read it easily by using large lettering.

- Based on a viewing distance of about a metre (3 ft 3 ins), you should position signs so that the bottom is at least 800mm (2 ft 6 ins) above ground level and the top is no more than 1850mm (6 ft) high. Mounting a sign at this level will mean most of the public are able to see it and it won't be hidden by ground vegetation. At the same time, you need to check that signs aren't too obtrusive and don't interfere with people's enjoyment of the countryside.
- Remember that where the public can approach an activity from several directions, then there may be a need to put up a sign on each approach. They should normally be set back to give a clearance of about half a metre (1 ft 8 ins) from the edge of the path, so there's less likelihood they'll be hit by vehicles.
- Signs need to be well secured and you should try to put them up on existing posts or other suitable structures as an alternative to new posts. Gate posts, stile posts, the parapets of bridges, steps, fences, walls and buildings are all possible supports. Telegraph and electricity supply poles may provide other possible alternatives, but if you're not the owner of the support, or it's not on your property, then you should ask the owner's permission before putting up a sign (this applies equally to installing posts in the ground). You can tie signs to trees or other living vegetation but avoid attaching them with nails or pins.
- Positioning a sign against a backdrop is important as it hides the back of the sign and reduces its prominence. Sometimes you may need to position them in the open, but try to avoid these sites as much as possible.
- You don't usually need planning permission for temporary signs of the size and type we're proposing in this document. For bigger signs or those with a longer life span you'll need to consult your local planning authority. You should also make sure that installing a post won't interfere with any underground services (electricity, telecommunication, gas, water etc.). Check the position of underground services before putting the post in by contacting Susiphone on 0800 800 333.
- Keep an eye on your signs and maintain them if they're up for any length of time. They can be knocked about by the wind, hidden by vegetation or even vandalised by an inconsiderate visitor. It's also worth watching how people react to your signs so that you know if they're in the right place and people are reading and complying with them.

Key points

Signs need to be carefully placed so that they are:

- **readily accessible;**
- **easily legible;**
- **free of surrounding vegetation.**

Position signs against existing posts, poles and other supports where possible.

3. What materials are available?

- For short-term purposes you can use laminated card or paper, but you have to make sure any nails or staples only go through the plastic border. Where the plastic is punctured and has paper underneath, water will penetrate and make your sign impossible to read.
- If you intend to use the signs repeatedly throughout the season, or from year to year, you should invest in a more robust product and have the signs manufactured on Foamex (rigid plastic) or Correx (corrugated plastic). These are waterproof, lightweight, durable materials that can easily be fixed to fenceposts etc. You can write on these signs with a waterproof marker pen and then remove your message with turps or petroleum based spirit.
- For longer term fixtures, such as a sign advising the public what to do when approaching a farmyard, use fibreglass. Although comparatively light, fibreglass signs are extremely strong and therefore resistant to weathering and vandalism.

Key points

The length of time you need a sign for is important in deciding which material to use:

- **for very short-term signage you can use laminated card or paper;**
- **for most temporary signage opt for a more durable material like Foamex;**
- **for signs with a longer life span use fibreglass.**

4. What colours work best?

- The colour of a sign should contrast with the landscape behind so that people with visual impairments can see it clearly. However, you don't want the sign so conspicuous that it becomes annoyingly prominent. Finding a compromise between these two positions is a delicate balance.
- Generally, dark text on a cream or pale yellow background gives good contrast, and white lettering against a dark blue or green background (see templates) also works well in the countryside. Many land managers will of course use black and white because this is readily available on computers and the easiest option to print out. This provides high contrast but it can be a bit harsh, especially in bright light, and some people can find it hard to focus on the lettering.
- Avoid the use of black lettering against a dark background and avoid combinations that will confuse people who are colour blind, such as red/yellow/green, red/black and blue/green/purple.

Key points

Clearly visible and legible signage with good contrast can be achieved by using:

- **dark text on a cream or pale yellow background;**
- **white lettering on a dark blue or green background.**

5. How to get your message across

- It's important that signs are clear, consistent and concise. A wide range of people use the countryside and you need to get your message across to everyone, including children and people with disabilities. Use language suitable for the reading age of about a 12-year-old and you'll communicate with as wide a cross-section of the population as possible.
- Address the public as 'you' and use other personal pronouns like 'we', 'they' etc. This helps people relate to the information at a personal level and makes it more likely they'll take notice of your message.
- Avoid jargon, technical terms and legal language, and always try to use words that the reader will understand. For instance, 'We'll be using a controlled fire to help regenerate the heather' tells the visitor exactly what you're doing, whereas 'We'll be muirburning....' is more direct but assumes a certain level of understanding on the part of the visitor.
- Keep your signs to under 100 words – and aim to use far fewer – or people won't read them. Use positive language and keep sentences short. For example, 'High fire risk – please guard against fire' is preferable to 'Be careful not to light fires during this prolonged dry period'.
- In areas of the Highlands & Islands where a high proportion of the public speaks Gaelic you may wish to consider making your signs bilingual.
- Use recognised symbols where you can, but add words to highlight hazards and explain the action that visitors should take.
- Only a small percentage of the public can read maps properly. If you're going to use them on signs then stick to sketches and make them simple and clear, like the one below *[example to follow]*. You also need to locate the sign so that visitors find it easy to relate what's on the sketch map to what appears on the ground.
- You can help widen a map's accessibility by including a description of the area covered by it. The description should highlight distinctive features – such as a stream, wall, gate or fence – or provide an accurate distance if there's no clear feature.

Key points

Keep your messages:

- **short and free of jargon;**
- **easy to understand with a reading age of about a 12-year-old;**
- **personal by using 'you', 'we' and 'they';**
- **specific by highlighting features on the ground.**

6. How to sign for all abilities

- Providing signs that are understandable by all isn't just about considering the needs of people with disabilities. A wide range of visitors – including older people, people with temporary medical conditions and children – will also appreciate the efforts you make.
- Generally, your text should be in type for maximum legibility. However, where you need to provide local up-to-date information, you may want to include handwritten entries. The templates at the end of this document show areas where the land manager is expected to insert individual handwritten information. Where handwritten entries are necessary, they should be kept to a minimum.
- Key points to incorporate on type and layout are *[these will be presented in a diagrammatic form in the final guidance]*:
 - Font size needs to be big enough for everyone to read at a reasonable distance. The recommended minimum type sizes for signs are: titles, 60-72 point; subtitles, 40-48 point; body text, 24 point; captions, 18 point. The templates follow these guidelines.
 - Use a simple and highly readable typeface, such as Helvetica or Arial; try to avoid serif typefaces, which have pointed bits (serifs) like this.
 - Lettering should be upper and lower case. AVOID USE OF CAPITALS IN CONTINUOUS TEXT – they're hard to read.
 - However, the letters of a heading, an imperative or a cautionary word can be upper case.
 - Spacing between words and letters is important – it makes for easier reading if it's not too tight.
 - Don't mix typefaces – use bold and different type sizes for emphasis.
 - Line length should be no more than about eight words. Long lines are tiring to read.
 - People with impaired eyesight prefer to read semi-bold or bold text.
 - Readability can be improved by creating a hierarchy of information through use of type size and weight – highlight the most important message in the largest type etc.
 - Leave plenty of white or background space – it allows the eye to rest as it reads.
 - Matt surfaces cause less glare than glossy surfaces.

Key points

Basic ways to make your signs understandable by all are:

- **use type on signs and keep handwritten entries to a minimum;**
- **choose easily legible typefaces;**
- **use upper and lower case lettering;**
- **follow established guidelines for the size of lettering on signs.**

SECTION 3

This section applies the guidance from Sections 1 and 2 to the specific circumstances for which land managers most commonly require signage. The standardised signage presented here offers a quick and easy way to integrate access with your day-to-day land management operations.

1. Sign templates

- The use of standardised templates can provide a convenient alternative to creating a new sign for every occasion. Attached are a selection of templates that can be adapted for most situations where you might wish to sign.
- These standardised signs provide handy, ready-made solutions for the most common land management situations. For circumstances where they are not relevant you can use the templates as examples of the sort of signage that is consistent with the Code. Using the templates and the information provided in Section 2 should enable you to create appropriate and acceptable signs specific to your own situation.
- The availability of templates does not mean you have to pepper your land with these signs. You only need to use them where they support your land management operations and help the public, as outlined in Section 1. The shooting sign, for instance, will not be appropriate on all occasions. You must decide as part of your risk assessment whether it would be appropriate on shoot days to put up signs on neighbouring paths or tracks that are used by the public.
- The colour templates are for handing over to a sign manufacturer for production on a durable and waterproof material such as Foamex. You can then insert handwritten information in order to provide visitors with relevant local advice. These entries can be added with waterproof marker pen and removed with a turps or petroleum based spirit in order to allow the sign to be re-used with new information.
- The nine templates appear as screen size pdfs but manufactured sizes will be as follows:
 - Sign 1 (Lambing) – 300x130mm
 - Sign 2 (Young Livestock) – 345x130mm
 - Sign 3 (Shooting) – 471x130mm
 - Sign 4 (Land Management Operation) – 460x130mm
 - Sign 5 (Farmyard) – 275x130mm
 - Sign 6 (Fire Risk) – 225x130mm
 - Sign 7 (Field Margin) – 308x130mm
 - Sign 8 (Wildlife Breeding Site) – 342x130mm
 - Sign 9 (Farm Traffic) – 325x130mm

The screen pdfs have been output with white lettering on a dark blue background but a couple also show the alternative black text on a cream background colourway.

- We're developing black and white A4 versions of the templates, which we intend to make available as web based products on the www.outdooraccess-scotland.com website. Land managers will be able to insert the information relevant to their own particular circumstances, print them out and laminate for use.
- The templates are still in a draft form. When they are finalised they will be issued to various sign manufacturers to inform them of the potential for making them available commercially.

Key points

Templates provide standardised layouts for signs. The availability of a template doesn't mean you have to put up that sign every time you carry out the associated activity. Your risk assessment should determine the requirement.

The templates can be given to a sign manufacturer for production and you can add handwritten information to provide localised advice.

Black and white A4 versions of the templates will be available as web based products on the www.outdooraccess-scotland.com website. These will be suitable for inserting information, printing out and laminating for use.

2. Sign families

- The templates cover the range of situations where land managers are most likely to require signs:
 - Lambing
 - Young farm animals in field
 - Farmyards
 - Farm traffic
 - Shooting
 - General land management operations
 - Nature conservation
 - Fire risk
 - Conservation headlands
- Scottish Natural Heritage, with input from the national Access Forum signs sub-group, have devised three sign 'families' to cover the sorts of situation outlined in this guidance – livestock, land management activities and what might loosely be called environment. These provide the following groupings:

Family	Subject
Livestock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lambing - Young farm animals in field
Land management activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Farmyards - Farm traffic

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shooting - General land management operations - Crop spraying
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature conservation - Fire risk - Conservation headlands

- Each of these families has been allocated a symbol, made up of three silhouette images within a triangle. One of these symbols appears at the top of every template to highlight the subject being addressed. The purpose of the symbols is:
 - to attract the attention of the visiting public;
 - to provide an immediate indication of what the sign message is about (livestock, land management, environment);
 - to establish a suite of widely used, instantly recognisable countryside signs.

3. Standard texts

- Standard texts have been developed for the templates. These provide the overall structure for the signs, with integral sections where you can insert information in order to provide visitors with relevant local advice. These entries will personalise signs and increase their credibility.

Key points

The templates cover common situations where signs may be required.

Each one has

- **a symbol at the top to indicate whether the sign relates to livestock, land management or environment operations;**
- **standard texts with integral sections where you can insert relevant local information.**