



**ANSI Z535.3-2022**

*American National Standard for  
Criteria for Safety Symbols*

Secretariat:

**National Electrical Manufacturers Association**

Approved: June 2, 2022

**American National Standards Institute, Inc.**

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## Foreword

In 1979, the ANSI Z53 Committee on Safety Colors was combined with the ANSI Z35 Committee on Safety Signs to form the ANSI Z535 Committee on Safety Signs and Colors. The Z535 Committee has the following scope:

To develop standards for the design, application, and use of signs, colors, and symbols intended to identify and warn against specific hazards and for other accident prevention purposes.

While the basic mission and fundamental purpose of the ANSI Z535 Committee is to develop, refine, and promote a single, uniform graphic system used for communicating safety and accident prevention information, the Z535 Committee recognizes that this information can also be effectively communicated using other graphic systems.

The Z535 Committee created subcommittees to update the ANSI Z53 and Z35 standards and to write new standards. To date, the following six standards make up the ANSI Z535 series:

- ANSI Z535.1 *Safety Colors* [ANSI Z53.1-1979 was updated and combined into this standard in 1991]
- ANSI Z535.2 *Environmental and Facility Safety Signs* [ANSI Z35.1-1972 and Z35.4-1972 were updated and combined into this standard in 1991]
- ANSI Z535.3 *Criteria for Safety Symbols* [new in 1991]
- ANSI Z535.4 *Product Safety Signs and Labels* [new in 1991]
- ANSI Z535.5 *Safety Tags and Barricade Tapes (for Temporary Hazards)* [ANSI Z35.2-1974 was updated and combined into this standard in 1991]
- ANSI Z535.6 *Product Safety Information in Product Manuals, Instructions and Other Collateral Materials* [new in 2006]

Together, these six standards contain the information needed to specify formats, colors, and symbols for safety signs used in environmental and facility applications, product and product literature applications, and temporary safety tag and barricade tape applications.

Published separately is the ANSI Z535 *Safety Color Chart*. This chart gives the user a sample of each of the safety colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, grey, white, and black. It also describes each color's ink formulation and closest PANTONE® color.

This ANSI Z535.3 standard was prepared by Subcommittee Z535.3 on Criteria for Safety Symbols. Other Z535 standards have provisions for a safety sign with an optional center symbol panel containing a graphic depiction of the message in the message panel, using the safety symbol criteria contained in this standard. The foreword and all annexes in this standard are considered to be "informative," which in the vocabulary of standards writing means that the content presented is for informational purposes only and is not considered to be mandatory or prescriptive in nature. The body of this standard is "normative," which means that the content is considered to be mandatory or prescriptive.

The ANSI Z535.3 standard was first published in 1991 and revised in 1998. The 1998 revision refined and added substance to the structure of the 1991 version (see Deppa et al., 1997; Annex C5, Reference 6). The forty-one referents in the original ANSI Z535.3 standard were selected because they addressed some of the most common, general, or critical hazards. The ANSI Subcommittee Z535.3 on Criteria for Safety Symbols reassessed the symbol examples illustrating these referents, both to ensure that the symbols had passed comprehension testing and to improve the depiction of these symbols in the standard. Further, the ANSI Z535 Committee recognized that this finite set of referents addressed only a fraction of the hazard referents for which safety symbols are needed. Since the committee's philosophy



was not to alter the scope of referents in the standard, their approach to meeting the need for new symbols was twofold: 1) provide the guidance necessary to create legible, standardized symbols; and 2) provide general procedures for comprehension testing symbols. Therefore, the 1998 revision contained the following changes:

a. Safety Symbol Example and Depiction Changes

Non-passing symbols were: 1) replaced with passing symbols or deleted; or 2) in the case of borderline comprehension, moved from the body of the standard to an annex. These changes resulted from researching the symbol testing results and determining that some symbols had not passed the required 85% recognition testing. The subcommittee had non-passing and non-tested symbols comprehension tested, along with other symbol alternatives that address the same referents, in an attempt to identify symbols that could pass the comprehension testing for those referents.

Surround shapes were discouraged from use with most symbols, except for Prohibition and the Safety Alert symbol. Illustrating the symbols in the 1991 version with surround shapes misled users to think that surround shapes were preferred, when in fact, a surround shape competes with the actual symbol for the available space. It was clarified that color generally should be used only for the safety red Prohibition symbol and safety red fire-related symbols. The 1991 version was probably not clear enough in that it appeared to mandate symbols with background colors. Test references were added so potential users could access testing details to determine whether previous testing is analogous to their situation or whether they may need to retest before using a symbol on their product.

b. Addition of Safety Symbol Creation Guidelines

In order to encourage both good symbol design and a degree of consistency between existing and new symbols, the revision included expanded guidelines for the creation of new symbols for new referents.

c. Test Procedure Changes

Multiple choice tests were discouraged since these tests are typically less accurate than open-ended testing in measuring the subjects' comprehension of symbols, primarily because they limit the range of answers allowed. Testing safety symbols in context was encouraged, since using words or pictures to convey where a label would be located is a fairer test of a symbol than testing without giving context. Progressive testing was described and encouraged to screen out poor symbols early, thereby limiting resource expenditures prior to full open-ended testing. Information on how to conduct comprehension tests was improved and expanded, including providing detailed guidance and actual examples of test administration materials.

In revising the ANSI Z535.3-1998 standard, work to retest the symbol examples and to rewrite the testing procedures was carried out simultaneously. Using this process, the subcommittee received valuable feedback not only on the symbols being tested but also on the problems and features of the test methodologies themselves. Lessons learned from each test iteration were used to improve test procedures and clarify test instructions. As a result, in addition to thoroughly tested symbol examples, this revision provided well-tested procedures for evaluating symbols. The Z535.3 Subcommittee believed that these improvements to ANSI Z535.3 facilitated the creation of symbols with improved legibility and consistency that are reliably comprehension tested.

In the 2002 revision, only minor revisions were made. In the 2007 revision, the Safety Alert symbol was expanded to harmonize with color alternatives contained in the ISO 3864-2 standard. In Annex A, Principles and Guidelines for Graphical Design of Safety Symbols, guidance was expanded, and more figures were added to illustrate the principles and guidelines presented. No significant changes were made to Annex B, General Procedures for Evaluating Candidate Safety Symbols. In Annex C, Safety Symbol Examples, guidance was also expanded. Safety symbols were moved from the normative body of

this standard to this informative annex, and Information symbols were added related to fire safety and safe condition that are contained in the ISO 7010 standard. A new Annex D, Informative References, was created that contained references relocated from the body of the standard.

The biggest revision in the 2011 edition was to delete the separate Annex C, Safety Symbol Examples, and move relevant parts to Annex A. Over the years since the committee's philosophy was not to alter the scope of referents, some of these symbols might be outdated, or ISO 7010 might have adopted other symbols. Instead of "symbol examples" in a separate annex, many of the safety symbols were moved to Annex A to illustrate principles and guidelines for graphical design. Further, graphical design guidelines duplicated in the body of the standard were deleted, so they now are in one location. Other revisions included refining Annex B General Procedures for Evaluating Candidate Safety Symbols by 1) adding a table of equivalent scoring if less than 50 subjects must be used; 2) providing controls and safeguards if the comprehension test must be administered over the Internet; 3) providing a minimum symbol size to test when the actual symbol size is unknown; and 4) adding an optional test question about the consequences of not following instructions.

Because of the differences in color printing technologies and color monitors, the appearance of colors in this document may not be accurate. See the ANSI Z535-2011 *Safety Color Chart* for the purpose of viewing accurate colors.

The 2011 version of this standard was reaffirmed in 2017.

The 2022 edition of this standard was revised in the following ways. First, multiple choice testing as a method of symbol comprehension testing was eliminated completely. It is an outdated method of comprehension testing that has not been recommended for decades. Second, several symbols in Annex A were updated. Third, an additional caveat was added to C1 Scope regarding variants in informative references.

Proposals for improvement of this standard are welcome. Information concerning submittal of proposals can be found at the back of this standard.

This standard was processed and approved for submittal to ANSI by the Accredited Standards Committee Z535 on Safety Signs and Colors. Committee approval of this standard does not necessarily imply that all committee members voted for its approval. At the time of approval, the ANSI Z535 Committee had the following members:

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Judith J. Isaacson, Vice Chair

Paul Orr, Secretary

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*Name of Representative:*

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*Brett Cohen  
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*Trung Hiu*

At the time it prepared this standard for Z535 Committee vote, Subcommittee Z535.3 on Criteria for Safety Symbols had the following members:

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Paul Orr, Secretary

Eric Boelhouwer  
Nathan Dorris  
Judith J. Isaacson  
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## **1 Introduction**

The U.S. population is multi-ethnic, highly mobile, and derived from a multiplicity of social and educational backgrounds, with different reading and word comprehension skills. These factors complicate the effectiveness of word-only signs. Effective safety symbols have demonstrated their ability to provide critical information for accident prevention and personal protection. Signs with safety symbols can promote greater and more rapid communication of the safety message, and therefore greater safety for the general population. Methodologies for designing and evaluating safety symbols are presented.

## **2 Scope and Purpose**

### **2.1 Scope**

This standard provides general criteria for the design, evaluation, and use of safety symbols to identify and warn against specific hazards and to provide information to avoid personal injury.

### **2.2 Purpose**

It is the purpose of this standard to promote the adoption and use of uniform and effective safety symbols for safety communication. This standard also provides a procedure for evaluating image effectiveness in communicating the intended message, as well as considerations for graphic design of safety symbols.