

City of Chicago Response

“We take our role of supporting the quality of life for Chicago residents through the enforcement of the Chicago Building Code very seriously, and we will continue to take action against any illegal signs in Chicago. Yet the goal of enforcement on illegal signs is to correct the problem, not just to level fines. The vast majority of sign violations that occur are from small businesses trying to advertise on-site. While the City increased the fine range for illegal signage, the goal was to punish deliberate violators who are in the business of advertising, not to penalize small businesses without giving them an opportunity to come into compliance with the law. To prevent the latter, the Code allows violators to come into compliance between their citation and hearing date without being subject to the stiffer fines. With that in mind, when we take action against an illegal sign the City first works to move a sign into compliance, which benefits our neighborhoods. Anecdotally, most of the sign violations are addressed between the time of enforcement by the Department of Buildings and the first court date as owners either take the signs down or simply get a permit.” – Commissioner Felicia Davis

Additional background:

- In March 2012, The Department of Buildings (DOB) launched a sign enforcement blitz focusing on large (100 square feet or greater) signs starting in the Central Business District and fanning out into the communities. The blitz, which concluded in June of 2012, resulted in 766 violations.
- In May 2012, City Code was amended to raise the penalties for signs erected or altered without the proper permits. Fines can be as high as \$10,000 per day depending on the size of the sign and if the sign is a dynamic image display sign the fines can be as high as \$15,000 per day. The Code was also amended to provide that compliance was an affirmative defense in the case of on-premise signs therefore violations for those on-premise signs if corrected would result in no fines.
- In August 2012, DOB, in conjunction with the Department of Law and the Department of Administrative Hearings, established a dedicated hearing call for sign cases at the Department of Administrative Hearings the third Wednesday of each month. Additionally, the Department will have an inspector present and ready present testify at this dedicated hearing call.
- In March 2013, City Code was amended to clarify that the conversion of an on-premise sign to an off-premise sign would require a new permit. Also the Code was amended to provide that all sign permits issued after the effective date would be for a five-year term and subject to renewal
- In July 2013, the City Council enacted a temporary moratorium on all dynamic image display signs of 100 square feet or less. The moratorium was to provide the City with time to examine the impact of dynamic image display signs and to draft regulations to address the same

- In April 2014, the Code was amended to place reasonable and balanced limits on the brightness levels, size, image movement, image change time, hours of operation and location (including distance from Residential Districts) of dynamic image display signs.