

# Creating Effective Websites

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Public Works Departments can benefit by having a website. Websites are often the first place citizen's will look for vital information. This article will discuss tips for designing an effective website.

## Information

The purpose of a website is to convey information. The following is a list of useful information to place on a public works webpage.

- Telephone number/e-mail lists,
- Recycling program,
- Solid waste removal,
- Hazardous waste disposal,
- Divisions: solid waste, waste water, drinking water, highway, administration, equipment, building/grounds,
- Job opportunities,
- Meetings,
- Road construction agenda,
- Plow policy,
- Link to town's homepage.

## Keep It Simple

A simple page is more professional. Don't try to fit a lot of information on a single page as this creates confusion. Keep pages short, so visitors won't have to scroll down, and narrow so they should never have to use the horizontal scroll.

Avoid the temptation to make the page unique with animation and complex graphics that have big files. These files take more loading time. Visitors won't wait long for a page to load. Essentially, a simple page conveys information more effectively.

## Links

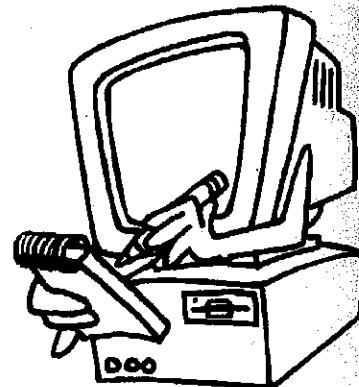
Many DPW's have links from their homepage to the departmental divisions and the town or city's homepage. Use links to keep the site more

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organized. When making other pages, keep the look of the webpages

consistent. Pages with a similar look assure visitors that they are still on the website. Links in the same location on all pages make

navigation easy for the users. Use templates for consistency when creating pages and to update them quickly.



## Background

Choose the background for the website with care. Avoid glaring colors that are hard on the eyes. A background that is too complex distracts from the text. A photo or picture as a background makes the text difficult to read.

## Text

Proper selection of text is key to a quality website. Here are some tips:

- **Size** – Text should be big enough to read, but not so big as to make the visitor scroll.
- **Color** – Use a color that contrasts the background, like a light colored text on a dark background or vice versa.
- **Font** – Try not to use more than 2 or 3 different font types. Unusual fonts won't be recognized by the computers of most visitors and will load with the computer's default font.

## Sites

There are several Public Works websites that exemplify the mentioned tips. Claremont's website is neat and organized. There are links to dif-

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- **NPDES II.**
  - *Road Business, Fall 2000*
  - EPA Fact Sheets and other information at [www.epa.gov/owm/sw/phase2/](http://www.epa.gov/owm/sw/phase2/)
- **GASB 34.**
  - *Road Business, Summer 2000.*
  - [www.gasb.org](http://www.gasb.org)
  - [www.gfoa.org](http://www.gfoa.org)
- **MUTCD Millennium Edition.**
  - Electronic copies are available at <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>.
  - Hard copies are planned for the spring.
- **Retroreflective Street Name Signs .**
  - *Road Business, Spring 1999*
  - MUTCD Millennium Edition, Chapter 2D
- **Center and Edge Line Marking..**
  - *Road Business, Spring 2000*
  - MUTCD Millennium Edition, Part 3
- **Retroreflectivity minimums.**
  - Researchers have published and presented papers in transportation engineering professional journals and meetings.
  - The first information for a general audience will probably be the proposed rule-making.
- **Wetlands permits.**
  - RSA-A:3 can be found at <http://sudoc.nhsl.lib.nh.us/rsa/>
  - NHDES Fact Sheets are at <http://www.des.state.nh.us/wet.htm>

## UNH T<sup>2</sup> Center Assistance

**Publications.** The UNH T<sup>2</sup> Center has past *Road Business* articles and hard copies of many website documents. They will obtain other information as it is published. Information requests can be by phone, fax, or email to UNH T<sup>2</sup> Center.

**Newsletter.** Future *Road Business* articles will cover new regulations as published. Articles will cover local practices and suggestions for compliance with rules.

**Workshops.** In 2001 the UNH T<sup>2</sup> Center plans workshops covering these regulations. In addition to describing them, instructors will describe management and technical solutions to reduce impacts.

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to find out exactly what makes them stay at a job. Keeping workers satisfied benefits both the worker and the municipality.

**Sources:**

- "Attracting & Retaining Employees: Here are Some New Ideas to Try." *Solutions for Business*. 1999. Advancement L.L.C. 06 Jun. 2000 <http://www.advapara.com/newslet/aprilmay/employ.html>
- Hendrix, Larry D. "Retention- Keeping Good Employees Productive and on the Job." *Tourism Educational Materials*. 19 Jun. 2000. Michigan State University Extension. 06 Jun. 2000 <http://www.msue.msu.edu/imp/modtd/33129605.html>
- Kennedy, Marilyn Moats. "It Looks like a Benefit, but for Whom?" *Milepost* Mar. 1999, 10-12.

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ferent divisions and the city's homepage. Information is easy to locate, including contact information.

The Somersworth Public Works Department also has an effective website. Visually, it is interesting to look at, boasting construction-related graphics and even animation. A small amount of animation can be pleasing if it loads quickly. The overall effect is practical and not overwhelming. Links are clearly defined, the background and text colors contrast well, and the Department's homepage fits on one screen. The page loaded quickly.

An effective website conveys vital information without overwhelming the visitor. Care should be taken when choosing fonts and backgrounds. A simple website is often more professional than an extravagant one.

**Claremont's website:**

[www.claremontnh.com/dpw\\_index.htm](http://www.claremontnh.com/dpw_index.htm)

Somersworth's website: [www.nh.ultranet.com/~sdpw/mission.htm](http://www.nh.ultranet.com/~sdpw/mission.htm)

**Useful design tips:**

<http://www.geocities.com/featuredsites/tips.html>

**Sources:**

"Website Design Tips". *The Best of Athens*. Aug. 28, 2000.

<http://www.geocities.com/featuredsites/tips.html>

