

Road Naming 101

The switch from rural route and box addressing to “city-style” addressing will affect all county residents who receive mail at a rural box. Changing one’s address is inconvenient and expensive and can even represent a challenge to one’s identity. Not everyone will be pleased to live on “Honeybee Lane” or “City Sewer Plant Rd.” City style addresses such as 505 Shady Trail have more flavor and character than rural route addresses such as Rt. 2 Box 118BB. Residents react to the assignment of new city style addresses with a great deal of emotion, both positive and negative, and may protest the road name and sometimes even the house number assigned.

Some counties have county road numbering systems that have been in place for years. Unfortunately, the numbering systems are not always consistent. Even numbered roads do not always run east-west, and numbers often are not sequential. For 9-1-1 purposes, road names, though more politically-charged, are preferred to numbers. They are easier to remember, especially for children, and not likely to be transposed with the house (address) number as road numbers often are. Along with being more popular with residents, they are preferred by post offices whose automatic sorting machines have much more trouble with numbers than names. If a house number is missing or is not decipherable, the machine may read the road number as the house address.

If a road has one standard, accepted name, it should be retained. Honoring the deceased wife of a former governor by changing “Camp Rd” to “Adrienne Grange Rd” will not be without challenge. Additionally, historic names for all county roads should be researched, preferably with the help of the county historic society, if one exists. Input from rural postal carriers, fire fighters, sheriff’s deputies and police officers, and long-time county residents should be solicited and considered carefully. Most counties find that many roads are known by more than one name, and the more common or oldest name will have to be determined. When deciding on names for unnamed roads or changing the name of a road with a duplicate road name, the county should:

Avoid naming roads for people and families. Not only does this lead to rampant sign theft, but even popular local families are never popular with everyone.

Avoid directionals such as “N,” “S,” “W,” “E,” “SW,” etc., wherever possible. Correspondents often forget the directional on letters, and residents sometimes forget to use it when giving directions.

Avoid duplicating road names wherever possible, and never duplicate within the same zip code or ESN area.

Road names which sound alike but are spelled differently are considered duplicates. Thus, "Kelly Ln" and "Kelli Ln" are duplicates.

Two roads with the same name but different suffixes are also considered duplicates. As with directionals, residents often do not bother to use the suffix. Thus, Oak Leaf Ln and Oak Leaf Dr are considered duplicate

Road names should be continuous from start to finish in the county. Avoid changing road names at intersections with other roads. If Black Rd. crosses Highway 50, it should still be "Black Rd" when it continues on the other side of the crossroad.

In the end, the county should have a road naming map which assigns one name (or number) to every US, State and county-maintained road. City streets which leave corporate limits and continue out into the county may use the city street name, with the suffix "Rd" instead of "St." Private lanes should be identified wherever possible. In general, the post office recommends a name for private lanes that have three or more residents or are ¼ of a mile long or longer. Some counties allow residents on private lanes to name their own lanes, with the stipulation that all residents must agree on the name, it must not be duplicated elsewhere in the county, and the county must give final approval. These issues are best dealt with by leaving road name suggestion cards at residences on private lanes during the field work stage, and allowing residents to list three name suggestions and submit them to the 9-1-1 office.

Avoiding duplicate road names is problematic. First of all, duplicate names often already exist on addressed streets within incorporated areas. Many towns have numbered streets (First Ave, Second St, etc.) and streets named for trees or presidents (Oak St, Lincoln St, Pine St). This duplication is acceptable in incorporated areas as these areas have different zip codes and more importantly, different community codes. A 9-1-1 call coming from the 401 Main St. in Pottsboro, TX would not be confused with one coming from 401 Main St. in Sadler, TX as the community for each call would be different.

Sometimes duplicate names will already exist in the same zip code. Ash St. in Denison TX, for example, consists of the 100 – 600 blocks. There is also an "Ash St" in a rural lake community served by the Denison post office with the same zip code as the city's Ash St. The rural Ash St., however, does not have city-style addressing. Residents on that street receive mail on Rural Route 3. When addresses are assigned to the rural residents in the Denison zip code, addresses given to the residents on Ash St. will duplicate addresses in the city of Denison unless the name of the street is changed. Though this is a necessary

change, residents will likely be angry and will probably not understand why their street had to change instead of the city street, arguing, perhaps, that their street had been there longer or was named before the other. The issue of which was named first is irrelevant. The real issue is which street was addressed first. Changing 40 addresses in the city of residents who had been using those addresses for emergency services, delivery and mail for years does not make sense when the alternative is changing 20 (or even more) that are currently using a rural route address (without mention of any street name) and must be changed regardless of the final street name.

The county can ease the situation by allowing residents on the affected street to choose a new name, or by choosing a similar name to the one that will change. As explained above, changing the suffix alone is not acceptable (Ash Lane, for example) as many people do not bother to write out this suffix when addressing letters. Nor is changing the spelling slightly, such as in "Ashe St.," or using a directional such as "N. Ash St." Using "Old Ash St.," "Ashland St.," or "Little Ash St.," however, are all acceptable solutions.

Using directionals on roads (N. Hwy 19 or W. Rangeline Rd.) is a potential solution to avoid duplication of road names in neighboring counties with implemented E9-1-1 systems. For example, if Stone County and Taney County are neighbors, and Taney County has a functioning E9-1-1 system, Stone County must take into account Taney County's addressing system when it implements its own E9-1-1 system. If Hwy 8 leaves Stone County and enters Taney County, all in the Galena zip code delivery area (post offices often deliver to more than one county), Stone County cannot use any addresses on Hwy 8 that duplicate those assigned by Taney County on the portion of Hwy 8 in the Galena zip code in its county. One solution is to use a different numbering system (all five digit numbers on the highway, for example, if the numbers are four digit in neighboring Taney County). Another is to split Hwy 8 in Stone County into a W Hwy 8 and an E Hwy 8. However, if Hwy 8 passes through two or more major towns, it is likely that each town has a different preconception of what "E Hwy 8" and "W Hwy 8" is. This can cause confusion and delay in giving directions and responding to emergencies.

After the road naming process is completed, preliminary road naming maps can be posted at city halls, the county courthouse and local post offices before addresses are converted and turned over to the post offices for approval. Press releases on local radio stations and in local papers should inform residents that the maps are posted and solicit comments and corrections. By the time the final address change letters reach residents, residents who are angry about the road name have had ample time to respond and comment before the road names were officially accepted and adopted. Even with these precautions, most counties allow residents to petition to change their road name for a short period after new address notifications are delivered. Counties often require 75 –100%

of residences on the affected road to agree to the name change before maps are changed and name change notices sent out.

However, it is important to note that road name changes can be expensive and affect other parts of the E9-1-1 system. Each road name change after the MSAG is loaded will require an MSAG change/update. Road signs may have to be removed and replaced. The post office and telephone company must be updated on the changes as well so their delivery records and database records can be updated.

In summary, road naming is a politically-charged activity. Approached with planning and forethought, it can be a smooth process that will lay the groundwork for the county's overall addressing plan.