

[an example of a student documentation page for the Make a Difference project]

The Splash Zone Alert System



The splash zone is just beyond the tree and is difficult to anticipate.

Designers

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The problem

Because the grass by the sidewalk is heavily watered, pedestrians on Elm Street are confronted with a section of the sidewalk that receives splashed water from passing cars. The situation can't be anticipated by walkers, so they often get mud on their work clothes.

The solution

We created an alert system that gives pedestrians an advanced warning of the problem. This consisted of well-designed chalk additions to the sidewalk as well as a temporary series of signs that are easily noticed. We also demarcated the sidewalk to show the worst extent of the splash zone so that pedestrians could walk around the risky area with confidence.

The solution's impact on its users

We installed the alert system at 6AM on Friday because this is a commute day when sidewalk use would be heaviest. We had also confirmed the sprinklers would be on earlier, creating the puddle problem.

After completing the installation, we sat down on a nearby bus stop bench to watch pedestrian's reaction. We noticed that users reacted to the sidewalk chalk first because most of them were looking down as they walked. The graphics we used seemed to be understood, especially the lines that demarcated the splash zone.

Some pedestrians smiled and even chuckled as they encountered our work. This opened up an opportunity to ask several of them what they thought of our solution. "I think it's a great idea", said one. "Most of the time I'm so absorbed in thinking about my day that I forget to dodge the water from passing cars. This might save me a dry cleaning bill or two." Another pedestrian asked us if this could be a permanent installation since so many people are splashed.

We noticed that the sidewalk chalk and line were much more successful than the signs we had installed. This seemed to be because people weren't looking where we had placed them. This is something we learned from the project- you can't always anticipate how people will use a design and it may have to be altered.



The sidewalk chalk offers advance warning of the hazard and shows the safe area that will keep pedestrians dry. Our solution started with post-style signs, but we found these were not usually observed by pedestrians.