

U.S. officials try fake speed bumps to slow drivers

BY SARA GANIM
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — Cathy Campbell did a double-take and tapped the brakes when she spotted what appeared to be a pointy-edged box lying in the road just ahead.

She got fooled.

It was a fake speed bump, a flat piece of blue, white and orange plastic that is designed to look like a 3-D pyramid from afar when applied to the pavement.

The optical illusion is one of the latest innovations being tested around the country to discourage speeding.

"It cautions you to slow down because you don't know what you are facing," Campbell said.

A smaller experiment two years ago in the Phoenix area found the faux speed bumps slowed traffic, at least temporarily.

Now, in a much bigger test that began earlier this month,



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Highway safety officials are testing whether a painted 3-D image of speed bumps will reduce speeding on a road in northeastern Philadelphia.

the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration wants to find out if the markers can also reduce pedestrian accidents.

The fake bumps are being tested on a section of road in a business and residential area in Philadelphia's northeastern cor-

ner. But soon they also will be popping up, or looking that way, on 60 to 90 more streets where speeding is a problem.

The 3-D markings are appealing because, at \$60 to \$80 each, they cost less than real speed bumps (which can run \$1,000 to

\$1,500) and require little maintenance, said Richard Simon, a highway safety administrator.

On one of three streets tested in the Phoenix trial, the percentage of drivers who obeyed the 25 mph speed limit nearly doubled. But the effect wore off after a few months.

Learning from the experience in Arizona, authorities are adding a publicity campaign in Philadelphia to let drivers know that the phony speed bumps will be followed by real police officers, said Richard Blomberg, a contractor in charge of the study.

Even after motorists adjust,

the fake bumps will act like flashing lights in a school zone, reminding drivers they are in an area where they should not be speeding, he said.

For increased nighttime visibility, the markers, made by Japan's Sekisui Jushi Corp., contain reflective glass beads.

They are the latest in a long list of traffic calming devices in use across the country, including various types of real bumps, dips, traffic circles and roundabouts.

Proponents said fake bumps require little engineering or planning and can work in places where real humps or dips in the road might not be acceptable, such as near a firehouse.

Philadelphia officials said they at least want to give them a shot.

The Associated Press interviewed about two dozen people who have driven over the fake bumps, and only a few said they braked for them.

Al Stevens and his 17-year-old son Andrew said they both encountered the illusions but with different results. Al Stevens saw them and kept going. His son, who has had a license for just two weeks, braked for them.

"I thought it was art," Andrew Stevens said. "I noticed they slow you down."