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The CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square Upgrades – FAQs

Q. Is the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square coming down?

A. No. CITGO is committed to preserving this iconic landmark, and we are working hard to make sure it shines brighter and stronger than ever. More than 9,000 feet of lights on the double sided, 60-foot by 60-foot sign are being replaced with the latest in LED lighting.

Q. How long will the sign be dark?

A. It will take approximately one to two months, beginning July 23, to clean the sign, replace the lights and install new computers to manage the famous animation. The sign will be dark during this time, but should be bright again just in time for the baseball playoffs.

Q. Why is work being done on the sign; didn't the sign get new lights several years ago?

A. Over the years, the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square has been subjected to the extremes of heat, cold, wind, rain and snow. This kind of exposure has caused damage to the current lights and faded the colors on the sign. In addition, major improvements in LED lighting have been made since the last upgrade. We want to take advantage of these innovations.

Q. What's so special about the lights you're putting in now?

A. The new LED lights are the most technologically advanced of their kind. They feature flexible connections that allow for expansion and contraction during temperature changes and extreme wind. This prevents cracking and potential water damage. Advanced materials are also being used to ensure the sign's colors withstand the impact of UV rays and remain bright for years to come.

Q. How long has the CITGO Sign been in Kenmore Square?

A. The iconic CITGO Sign has stood high above the Boston skyline since 1940. Located at 660 Beacon Street, on what was once a Cities Service divisional office, the sign originally featured the Cities Service logo. The sign was replaced with the famous CITGO "trimark" of today when the CITGO brand was created for the marketing division of Cities Service in 1965. Although the building currently houses the Boston University bookstore, the sign remains a landmark on the city's skyline.

Q. Why did CITGO choose to work on the sign now?

A. While the sign is in need of repair, this timeframe also ties to the celebration of our Centennial milestone on Sept. 2. The CITGO Sign in Boston’s Kenmore Square is a major part of our history and is as recognizable as the great service provided by locally owned and operated CITGO stations. As we look to a bright future for our local Marketers, Retailers and loyal customers, we want to make sure our most iconic image shines too.

Q. Who maintains the CITGO Sign in Boston’s Kenmore Square day-to-day?

A. Martin Foley of Foley Electric has been “Keeper of the Sign” since 1965. Over the years, he has maintained and cared for the sign through bulb burnouts and hurricanes, lightning storms and power outages. His ritual – hoisting himself around the face of the CITGO Sign in a wooden swing – has become as much a part of Boston as the Boston skyline itself.

Q. How big is the CITGO Sign in Boston’s Kenmore Square?

A. The CITGO Sign is double-sided and approximately 60 feet by 60 feet. It is said to be the largest sign in New England and features more than 9,000 linear feet of LEDStripe units. In total, approximately 218,000 LED lights are used to light up the iconic image in the night sky.

Q. Why hasn’t the CITGO Sign in Boston’s Kenmore Square been dismantled?

A. The iconic CITGO sign has been a part of Boston skyline since 1940. Located at 660 Beacon Street, on what was once a Cities Service divisional office, the sign originally featured the Cities Service logo, but was replaced with the famous CITGO “trimark” of today when the CITGO brand was created for the marketing division of Cities Service in 1965.

Efforts to remove the sign in the early 1980s faced fierce opposition and led CITGO to restore the sign, with groups even fighting to declare the sign a landmark. The CITGO Sign is held in particular high regard by Boston sports fans. Red Sox sluggers are enticed by the so called “C-IT-GO” sign as they blast home runs over the left-field wall, and runners in the grueling Boston Marathon welcome its sight as the 20th mile mark. Its pulsing flash in the night sky has even been used by mothers-to-be at nearby Beth Israel to time their contractions.

It’s no secret that the CITGO Sign in Boston’s Kenmore Square is beloved by people across the country and around the world. Not only has it become a major image of the city of Boston, featured in postcards and tourist brochures, but the sign was deemed an “Objet d’Heart” by *Time Magazine*, was photographed by *Life Magazine* and featured in the *New York Times*. It has even become a source of inspiration for artists, musicians and filmmakers from around the world.

In celebration of our Centennial milestone on Sept. 2, CITGO looks to a bright future for our local Marketers, Retailers and loyal customers and wants to make sure our most iconic image shines too.

Q. How much energy does the sign use; is it environmentally friendly?

A. The CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square uses extremely energy efficient technologies. Compared to the original neon lights, the sign today uses roughly half the electricity and saves more than \$18,000 per year in energy. The upgraded sign is also much safer, using 24 volts to power the sign versus around 15,000 volts in the original sign. What's more, CITGO participates annually in Earth Hour, along with companies and cities across the globe, by turning off the sign as a symbol of our commitment to global energy efficiency.

Q. How can you be sure the new sign will be safe; will be able to stand the weather?

A. The technology of the new lights has passed more than 1,000 hours of reliability testing and elevated temperatures, and the acrylic material is an impact-modified product designed to stand up to wind and the movement of the sign itself. These materials have been used in more than 1 million feet of gas stations canopies, border trimming on buildings, signs and bridges.

Q. Who is undertaking the work on the sign?

A. The upgrades to the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square are being performed by Federal Heath Sign Company, a global industry leader in custom signage. Federal Heath provides innovative products and services to ensure the most vivid, energy-efficient and technologically advanced signs.

Q. How are the colors made using the LED lights?

A. Federal Heath incorporates innovative techniques and several different LED color combinations to match the blue, white, orange and two different shades of red that make up the colors of the CITGO brand. The white color is achieved by using a combination of blue and white phosphorous. Blue is used for the CITGO letters, and the trimark is split into three segments, each with a different color combination of red and amber. Additionally, the new covers being used to protect the sign are reinforced to withstand UV rays, impact from ice and battering from high winds.

Q. How far is it from home plate at Fenway Park to the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square?

A. The CITGO Sign is approximately 1,200 feet from home plate at Fenway Park. While out of range for even the strongest batters, it hovers perfectly over the Green Monster in left field and serves as an inviting target, particularly during night games.

Q. Has any baseball player ever hit a ball into the sign?

A. No. The longest home run on record at Fenway Park is a 502-foot shot into right field hit by Red Sox legend Ted Williams in 1946. Williams smashed the home run off Detroit right-hander Fred Hutchinson on June 9, knocking the hat off a fan. Today, a red seat marks the historic spot where the ball landed. At approximately 1,200 feet from home plate, the CITGO Sign is fairly safe from home run hits, but that's not to say players don't try to hit it every time they step into the batter's box.

Q. Can I go up on the roof to get a closer look at the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square?

A. Unfortunately not. For safety reasons, only authorized personnel have access to the roof of 660 Beacon Street and to the CITGO Sign.

Q. Does the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square move in the wind, if so how much?

A. In its 70-year history, the CITGO Sign has withstood hurricanes, ice storms, Nor'easters and lightning strikes, and it has remained standing. When exposed to high winds, the sign can sway as much as two feet; however, its sturdy positioning ensures that the sign remains safely in place. What's more, the new LED lights will also help the sign withstand the elements, as they can flex with extreme wind and temperature variations without breaking or suffering water damage.

Q. Has the sign ever gone dark before?

A. In 1979, at the urging of then Governor Edward J. King, the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square was darkened as a symbol of energy conservation. At that time it used only \$60 worth of power each week. The sign remained dark for four long years until it was relit at the urging of local residents. Additionally, the sign is darkened each year as part of our commitment to the global Earth Hour initiative for energy conservation awareness.

Q. What determined the location of the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square?

A. The CITGO Sign's Beacon Street location originally served as a Cities Service divisional office in 1940, and Cities Service introduced the CITGO brand in 1965. Today, 660 Beacon Street is home to the Boston University bookstore, but the iconic sign remains.

Q. Is the sign lit every day?

A. With the exception of going dark on certain occasions such as Earth Hour, the computer-operated, double-faced CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square illuminates the night from dusk until midnight every day.

Q. How much neon did the old sign use?

A. Prior to the 2005 renovation, the CITGO Sign in Boston's Kenmore Square contained more than five miles of neon, including 5,878 glass tubes that were lit by 250 high-voltage transformers.