



A dangerous occupation

Frankie Wilson, an assistant maintenance supervisor for ODOT, stepped out of her one-ton pickup on the workers' side of highway construction barrels on the southbound side of Interstate 5.

It was about 2 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 21, 2004. And this night shift with the highway crew turned into a workers' worst nightmare.

"I never saw him coming," Wilson told television reporters. "I heard a noise. All I saw was this bright light. And then an explosion. Debris was falling all over and around me."

The impact slammed the pickup into Wilson, throwing her at least 10 feet – and into a travel lane. Fortunately the 24-year veteran was conscious and aware she was seconds away from being run over on the dark highway.

She crawled to safety with a broken hip.

The driver that hit the truck fared far worse.

The small car he was driving had plowed partially under and alongside Wilson's truck, spun away and rolled. As it rolled, the roof tore off, ejecting the driver and fracturing his skull.

"Don't call this an accident," Wilson told reporters. "An accident is something that cannot be avoided."

Barely over a week later, Baldock maintenance section workers Doug Holley and Don Davis were out of their one-ton pickup on the shoulder of I-5 northbound in the early morning hours of Sunday Feb. 29, putting up signs announcing a lane closure.

A car zoomed down an on-ramp and ran into the back of their truck. Flying debris and the truck itself pounded into Holley and Davis, injuring both of them, as well as the car's driver.

"I was thrown into a travel lane," Holley said. "I looked up and saw the bright lights of another car barely fifty feet away. I had to jump out of the way to avoid being hit a second time."

In both cases, each vehicle in the ODOT convoys — three or more vehicles stretched along the highway, working together — carried large portable reader boards with flashing yellow signs or arrows, quite visible: CAUTION. Both drivers were charged with reckless driving and driving under the influence of intoxicants.

And, broken hip and all, Frankie Wilson sat through four long TV interviews to get the word out to the public.

"Driving is a privilege," she told reporters. "You need to pay attention. If we can get even one person more to pay attention, this is worth it."