

Work Zone Safety Fact Sheet and Safety Tips 2008

Background

- Vehicle volumes on the state highway system have doubled in the past 20 years, increasing the risks for highway construction workers.
- In addition, the Oregon Transportation Investment Act is roughly doubling the number of work zones on state and local highways and bridges.

Nature of the problem

- National studies indicate that **driver inattention** is the single biggest factor in work zone crashes.
- Excessive vehicle speed is also a serious problem.
- Some 42 percent of work zone crashes occur in the transition zone *prior* to the work area.

Magnitude of problem

- Oregon averages about ten traffic-related work zone deaths and 450-500 crashes each year.
- For 2007, the preliminary number of work zone fatalities in Oregon is eleven. In 2006, the number was five, about what it averaged in the early '00s. In 2005, fatalities increased to 20, and in 2004, there were twelve fatalities in work zones.
- Nationally in 2006, there were 1,010 fatalities in work zones. In 2005, there were 1,058 and in 2004, there were 1,063 work zone fatalities.
- On average, there are three work zone fatalities every day across the country – about one every eight hours. In addition, there are 160 work zone injuries a day on average – one every nine minutes.
- The situation is serious for both drivers and workers, but on average in Oregon, there are actually ***far more drivers and their passengers killed and injured in roadway work zones compared to workers.***
- Highway construction is one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States: *the risk of death is seven times higher for highway workers than for an average worker.*
- Work zone crashes tend to be more severe than other types of crashes.

What ODOT is doing...

- Administering about \$3.6 million in federal funds for special work zone traffic patrols from July 2007 – June 2009 on state highways. Some funds are used for public information, education and police enforcement-related equipment.
- Continually reviewing projects, policies, procedures, training, contract specifications and work zone evaluations, as well as legislative and educational efforts, to seek improvements.
- Participating in extensive training, both internally and externally, on work zone safety and flagging safety, temporary traffic control plans design, enhanced traffic control supervision and inspection, and work zone traffic analysis.
- Using barriers in work zones, when practical, to separate work from traffic.
- Closing roadway segments to traffic to reduce risks to workers and drivers and expedite construction schedules.
- Performing work at night, when possible, to mitigate exposure.
- Providing enhanced traffic control planning, plus dedicated traffic control supervisors.
- Communicating with motorists using “**Give ‘Em A Brake**” and “**Slow Down, Better Roads Ahead**” campaigns that include print, radio and television media.

What's coming up during the 2008 construction season?

- Enhanced safety in flagging: flaggers must be 18 years of age and wear ANSI Class II garment.
- Expanded training for ODOT and its contractors in work zone set-up, placement and inspection through Inspector Certification and Traffic Control Supervisor Certification.
- Performance-based contracts that improve safety through plans, policies and practices.
- Continued study of the use of variable speed signing in selected work zones.
- Continued use of speed reduction orders requiring drivers to follow lower regulatory speeds in qualifying work zones.

What's coming up, *continued*

- Increased number of Traffic Control Supervisors on projects to ensure the safe placement and condition of traffic control devices.
- Promoting the use of 511 through work zone enforcement public information and education campaign.
- Additional police agencies participating in special enforcement patrols.
- Continuation of double fines for traffic law violations in work zones.
- Active efforts by public works and contractor crews to make sure signing accurately reflects work activity.
- Continued partnering with the Oregon Trucking Associations and Association of General Contractors to improve safety in work zones.
- Further progress on the pilot project for photo enforcement in a work zones, authorized by the 2007 Legislature; this allows a law enforcement agency to provide photo radar in a work zone.

Safety Tips

For drivers

- The **number one, most important action** drivers can take is to pay complete attention to the driving task, especially in the transition zone before the work area. An inattentive driver is the most common factor in work zone crashes.
- Orange is your clue! Slow down when you see orange signs, barrels and barricades. Speeding is the second most common factor in work zone crashes.
- Double your following distance. Don't tailgate.
- Get in the correct lane *well in advance*.
- Remember, work zone traffic lanes often are narrow, without shoulders or emergency lanes.
- Be aware of temporary accesses to the roadway from the median.
- Expect delays — plan for them and leave early to reach your destination on time.
- Patience is vital! Be as courteous to other drivers as you'd like them to be to you.
- Avoid work zones when you can by using an alternate route.
- Call 511 for the latest traffic, weather and highway conditions by route or mountain pass.
- Visit www.TripCheck.com to check routes, work zones and road and weather conditions before you head out.

For workers

- **Expect the unexpected and don't assume drivers see you.**
- Workers need to understand the difficulty drivers have in negotiating the work zones. In order to make the area as safe as possible, workers should avoid requiring drivers to make sudden lane changes or encounter unexpected conditions.
- Workers need to pay attention to the traffic and not become complacent.
- Don't have your back to traffic. If you must have your back to traffic, use a spotter. Have a communication plan between the spotter and the workers.
- Flaggers need to stand on the shoulder and be diligent in paying attention to motorists. Avoid standing in the lane unless visibility is an issue. Once traffic is stopped, flaggers should move back to the shoulder of the road.
- Bring more attention to yourself by wearing ANSI Class 3 protective garments, especially effective at night or during low-light conditions.