

## Highway Work Area Driving

As airline ticket prices skyrocket and with people taking trips via America's roadways increases, so does the likelihood of a traffic accident along one of our many highway work zones.

Work area safety is a growing roadway safety concern. In 2008, there were 720 work zone fatalities; this figure represents 2% of all roadway fatalities for the year. For 2008 nearly 2.4 million people were injured and 37,261 people died on our Nation's roads and highways. Over four out of every five work zone fatalities were motorists. In addition, there were over 40,000 injuries in work zones. When put into perspective, that equated to:

- ☠ One work zone fatality every 10 hours (2.3 a day)
- ☠ One work zone injury every 13 minutes (110 a day)

A more sobering statistic according to The Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) is approximately every three days, a teen is killed and seven are injured in a work zone crash somewhere in the United States.

The United States Department of Transportation defines a highway work area as - *"That part of the highway being used or occupied for the conduct of highway work, within which workers, vehicles, equipment, materials, supplies, excavations or other obstructions are present."*

### **Some things to keep in mind when traveling on our roads and highways are:**

- ☠ The most common crash in a highway work zone is the rear-end collision.
- ☠ As more emphasis is put on rebuilding/refurbishing the highway system in the post-interstate era, more work zones will be set up each year. More zones mean more risk of collisions and deaths.
- ☠ Most ticket fines may be doubled in work zones.
- ☠ Traffic enforcement is enhanced in work zones because of all the potential risks. Enforcement of traffic laws in work zones is maintained 24 hours a day, work zone speed limits are enforced even if no work is underway.

### **Driving situations that a motorist may encounter as a result of the establishment of a work zone:**

- ☠ Lack of shoulder and/or median areas that usually serve as safety valve areas .
- ☠ Lanes reduced in width and lanes merging and subsequently reduced in number
- ☠ Speed regulations and changing lane patterns.
- ☠ Detours to unfamiliar routes.
- ☠ Large construction or maintenance vehicles to the side of the road that may obstruct vision.

- ☒ Highway workers standing and working near traffic along with slow moving construction vehicles.
- ☒ Drivers slow to reduce speed and/or merging at the last possible moment.
- ☒ Aggressive drivers disregarding the work zone restrictions.
- ☒ Drivers not using common sense in the work zone area.
- ☒ Some work zones are mobile, such as line painting and road patching operations. (These zones move along the highway until the work is completed). Obey the signs until you have passed the ones that state you have left the work zone.

### **Some suggestions for driving safely through a work zone:**

- ✓ Be conscientious by always remembering that workers may be present even if you don't see them.
- ✓ Expect delays and plan your travel time accordingly can reduce stress that often leads to dangerous aggressive driving behavior and "road rage."
- ✓ Be aware by checking your daily newspaper for current construction locations and detours.
- ✓ Watch for signs especially signs posted in advance of construction, these signs will help you find alternative routes. Also, detours or lane closures may change daily as traffic patterns in work zones are adjusted according to work being conducted and completed.
- ✓ Slow down as soon as the signs tell you to. Stay calm and expect the unexpected.
- ✓ A "flagger ahead" warning sign may be posted as you approach the work zone. Obey the flagger's directions; a flagger has the same authority as a regulatory sign, so you can be cited for disobeying his/her directions.
- ✓ When you see flashing arrow panels, or "lane closed ahead" signs, merge as soon as possible.
- ✓ Follow the speed limit especially in work zones, which can differ from normal limits and should be obeyed as workers may be just a few feet away from open lanes of traffic.
- ✓ The most common crash in the highway work zone is the rear end collision, so leave plenty of space between you and the car in front of you (the 3 second rule would be best).
- ✓ Observe all posted signs until you see the one that states you have left the work zone and if you already know of the existence of a work zone, you may want to plan an alternative route.
- ✓ Be extra careful at night because construction is often performed at night in order to avoid lane closures during peak traffic hours. However, reduced driver visibility can be a danger to workers. Be extra careful when driving through work zone areas at night.

### **Work Zone Safety: It's Everybody's Business**

Work zones on U.S. highways have become increasingly dangerous places for both workers and travelers, with the death rate approaching two per day.

With more than 70,000 work zones in place across America on a given day, highway agencies are realizing that it is not enough to focus on improving the devices used in the work zone areas, but that they must also reach out to the public in order to change the behavior of drivers so that crashes can be prevented. Motorists who drive through work zones every day often do not pay enough attention to the advisory signs and thus fail to heed the posted warnings. Drivers must remain aware of the fact that work zones require greater caution, adjusted speed appropriate for conditions, and heightened alertness. So remember; Drive with care to make sure you and the people building the roads make it home safely another night.

***So stay Alert and Stay alive!***

George C. Arzente  
Safety and Occupational Health Specialist  
Installation Safety Office, Fort Campbell, KY  
10 December 2009