

How to Protect Workers in Highway Construction Zones



Workers in highway construction zones are very vulnerable to injury—from both construction equipment and passing motorists. For example, Luis Jimenez, 49, and his son Edward, 24, both worked in highway construction in Florida. In March 2008, a Ford Freestyle was passing the work zone, ran off the road and struck Edward, who was standing on the shoulder. Then the vehicle hit a trailer, jumped a guardrail and ran over Luis. Both men died.

According to the **NIOSH science blog**, from 1995 through 2002, 844 fatal occupational injuries occurred at road construction sites in the US.

Canadian workers aren't any safer in highway work zones. That's why jurisdictions such as BC, MB, and NL have "safe road" awareness campaigns designed to teach motorists to slow down and be more careful driving through highway construction zones. And some jurisdictions, such as ON, NL, and NS, have increased the penalties for drivers who do speed through such zones.

Worker Safety Tips

Here are some safety tips for workers working in highway construction zones:

- Face oncoming traffic while working.
- Ensure that work lights don't blind approaching drivers.
- Look for oncoming traffic before opening doors and stepping out of vehicles.
- Be aware of your proximity to traffic.
- Use automated traffic control systems, barriers, lane control devices, flaggers, flares, flashing lights, traffic cones and warning signs.

Motorist Safety Tips

Here are some tips for driving in construction zones from the Alberta Motor

Association:

- Check road reports ahead of time and use an alternate route if possible.
- When approaching a construction zone, use extra caution and slow down where people are working on or near the road.
- Obey all directions by flag people. Treat flag people working on roads with respect and remain calm if traffic's delayed.
- Be patient with construction speed limits and road markers.
- Obey all warning signs, traffic control devices and posted speed limits within the zone.
- Avoid changing lanes, look well ahead and be ready for sudden stops.
- Expect delays and be aware that your trip will take a little longer when travelling through construction zones.
- Be ready day or night as road construction can happen at any time and doesn't just occur in the daytime hours.
- Because vehicles ahead of you may stop unexpectedly, keep lots of space and be prepared to stop.
- Keep space between your vehicle and any equipment parked or being operated in these zones.
- If your lane is blocked and no one is directing traffic, yield to the traffic coming from the opposite direction. When the way is clear, move carefully around the obstacle. Remember that a construction zone is a place where drivers should anticipate unpredictable activity as well as unreliable road conditions.