Spot The Safety Violation: What's Wrong with this Buffer Zone?

Do you think this setup provides adequate protection for these workers on a busy road'

During the summer, a lot of work is done on or near roads, highways, etc. In addition to the 'usual' safety hazards such work can pose, workers are also at risk of being struck by passing motorists. That's why it's important to have adequate safety measures in place to protect them while they're working by or on roads and highways.

This picture from elcosh shows workers repainting arrows on what seems to be a fairly busy street. They're wearing high-visibility vests and have set up cones around their work area. But the buffer zone they've created doesn't provide adequate space between them and traffic.

These workers were fortunate that they didn't get hurt. But other workers have paid with their lives for inadequate traffic control measures.

Example: Two workers preparing to install an automatic traffic counter activated their work vehicle's warning lights, stopped in the passing lane and began to prepare their equipment. An approaching pickup truck struck the work vehicle, causing it

to spin and strike one worker. He died from his injuries. The MOL found that the employer failed to ensure the flow of traffic was appropriately controlled with the use of a sign truck equipped with a flashing arrow and properly positioned ahead of the work vehicle. The employer pleaded guilty and was fined $100,000 [*Pyramid Traffic*, Ontario Govt. News Release, Aug. 19, 2013].

4 STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE TRAFFIC CONTROL

An effective way to ensure that workers are safe when they're working on or near active roadways is with a traffic control plan, which you can develop and implement in four steps:

Step #1: Assess the location of the work. Assess all key aspects of the location where the work will be done, including the type of road, approaches to the work area, speed limit, traffic volume, shoulders, weather conditions and any site hazards.

Step #2: Assess the risks of the work. Consider any risks of the work itself, such as where it'll be done (on the road, on the shoulder, etc.), whether the site is stationary or moving, the type of work, the equipment to be used and the hours of work.

Step #3: Develop a plan. Based on the hazards identified in the above assessments, develop a traffic control plan that spells out the safety measures you'll use to protect workers from these hazards. This form can help you develop an appropriate traffic control plan.

Step #4: Train workers. Train all workers who'll be doing the work near the road as well as those acting as traffic control persons or 'flaggers' on the traffic control plan. And make sure to keep a copy of the plan at the worksite at all times.

You can also adapt this checklist or this one for your OHS program and the traffic control requirements in your

jurisdiction’s OHS regulations, and use it when planning and preparing a traffic control plan to ensure that it’ll effectively protect workers from identified hazards.