You Can Help Make Highway Work Zones Safer



What’s At Stake

Highway work zones continue to have far too many traffic fatalities. Hundreds of people are killed in work zones each year. The victims include both construction workers and occupants of the vehicles trying to rush past them.

What’s The Danger

A highway work zone is a designated area on a street or highway where construction is taking place. It can be recognized by distinctive orange and black signs, as well as lighted barricades, flaggers and other means of signaling. It’s a maze of activity that often causes confusion and dangerous driving responses.

Example

Luis Jimenez, 49, and his son Edward, 24, were reportedly very close. They lived in the same house and did the same kind of work: highway construction. And in a twist of tragic irony, they were killed by the same vehicle. In March 2008, a car 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.

How To Protect Yourself

It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure that workers and motorists who enter highway construction zones are safe. Here are some important tips to keep in mind when driving in a work zone:

- Don’t be distracted by the workers. Activity close to the road can be distracting, so pay extra attention to your driving, the other traffic and any possible obstacles.
- Be alert. Construction sites are active and continually changing. Don’t just blindly follow a pilot truck if it is leading you into the path of a moving grader. Watch for obstructions extending out into your lane of travel, such as loads on trucks and buckets on backhoes.
- Be prepared to act quickly. Gear down if necessary, and stay ready to brake. Check your rearview mirror to see if other vehicles are slowing down as they should. Flash your brake lights if necessary.
- Allow space between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. Tailgating contributes to many collisions in work zones.

- Turn on your lights so that other drivers and equipment operators can see you better.
- Minimize distractions in your car. Don’t fiddle with the CD player when you’re in a work zone.
- Do not pass in a work zone.
- Do not change lanes unnecessarily.
- Keep up with the traffic flow.
- Do not exceed the posted speed limit.
- Even if you don’t see anyone working, follow the instructions, such as speed limits. Otherwise, you might be going too fast to negotiate narrow lanes, sudden turns and rough road surfaces.
- Be patient. Many crashes have occurred when warning signs are placed far from the work zone and impatient drivers speed up. It’s the work zone supervisor’s responsibility to place signs correctly, but it’s your responsibility to heed warnings and drive safely.

Final Word

When driving in a work zone, put yourself on high alert. Be aware of your surroundings and help make sure that you and the people building the roads make it home safely another night.