

# CDOT honors fallen workers

Two employees killed last year; toll rises to 57

By Charley Able, Rocky Mountain News

April 4, 2007

Colorado Department of Transportation employees paused Tuesday to honor two colleagues killed on the job last year and to remember the nearly five dozen who have perished since 1929.

"This year is particularly hard for CDOT as our number of work-related fatalities has increased from 55 to 57 with the tragic loss of Charles Mather and Rodger Bell," said Pam Hutton, the agency's chief engineer.

Mather was killed Aug. 30 when a tractor-trailer rig hit a rotomiller he was operating on Interstate 25 about two miles south of Colorado City.

Bell was electrocuted June 26 when his dump truck's raised bed struck a power line on U.S. 160 east of Mancos.

"Like every other employee killed in the line of duty, Charles and Rodger were wonderful employees, they really, truly were. They were our friends," Hutton said.

"All 57 employees held a special place in CDOT's family and they are greatly missed.

The ceremony at department headquarters in Denver was one of 10 conducted by transportation department employees around the state in observance of National Work Zone Awareness Week.

"Today's ceremony not only pays tribute to the 57 CDOT employees killed in the line of duty over the past 70-plus years, but it also highlights the significance of work zone safety, which has become a growing problem," said Russell George, the agency's executive director.

Of the 57 deaths, 22 were in work zones.

Five of those work-zone deaths have happened in the past five years.

National statistics compiled by the Federal Highway Administration indicate work-zone fatalities increased 40 percent in the past decade.

In 2005, 1,074 work-zone deaths were recorded nationally, representing 2.5 percent of all roadway fatalities.

The federal agency's statistics indicate a fatality occurs inside a work zone once every 8.2 hours, about three each day, and a work-zone injury occurs every nine minutes, about 160 each day.

One of every four work-zone fatalities are highway workers, the remainder are motorists.

"With construction season starting, it is important that we all take time to remember these great employees and regain our focus on this important issue," George said.

"While our employees work hard to keep our highways safe, we still need the traveling public to do their part as the majority of these crashes are preventable."

[ablec@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:ablec@RockyMountainNews.com) or 303-954-5020