

State police using cameras to nab work zone speeders
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SPRINGFIELD - Smile, leadfoot. You're on camera.

Didn't you see the signs saying there was a 45-mile-per-hour construction zone ahead? Didn't you at least tap the brakes when the radar board clocked your speed at 62?

Well, here's a prediction: You're gonna get a letter from the Illinois State Police in the next couple of weeks telling you to fork over \$375 for your little joyride. Don't feel so zippy now, eh?

As the warm-weather highway construction season kicks back into gear, state police and the Illinois Department of Transportation are once again going to be out in photo enforcement vans to nab drivers who don't slow down for work zones.

Since last July, when the program started, the vans have caught 4,000 drivers. Fines are \$375 for the first offense, and \$1,000 for each succeeding ticket, along with a loss of driving privileges for 90 days.

Last year, three vans were stationed at construction sites - two in the Chicago area and one downstate, which primarily alternated between the Metro East area and work on an Interstate 74 upgrade near Peoria, said IDOT spokesman Mike Claffey. Sometime this summer, a fourth van will be added to the photo fleet.

Three will be assigned to tollway and IDOT projects in and near Chicago, and the other will roam downstate highways, "depending on where the major activity is," Claffey said.

Under Illinois law, the white vans with state police logos on the side are operated by specially trained troopers, he said. The vans will have speed boards either on top or nearby to tell drivers how fast they're traveling and give them an opportunity to slow down. A sign also will alert motorists that photo radar enforcement is under way.

"The oncoming traffic will certainly know," Claffey said, "and then the van has a camera that will snap a very clear picture of the car and the driver. They're able to zoom in and get a very clear image of the driver."

Tickets are sent out by certified mail within 14 days of the offense.

Photo vans will only operate in areas where workers are present, Claffey said, but patrol officers can still issue tickets to anyone speeding through a work zone at any time.

In 2003, before the stiffer fines and photo enforcement, 44 fatalities, including five workers, occurred in construction zones, according to state police. Last year, there were 28 fatalities, including one worker.

Today, state police officers and IDOT workers will be at 32 rest stops across Illinois, "handing out fliers and little orange ribbons just to remind people that construction season is under way," Claffey said.