

Heed warnings when traveling in work zones

By DENNIS KUTAC Staff writer



MCC/Dennis Kutac TxDOT reminds motorists to be cautious when passing through a work zone.

Although Work Zone Safety Awareness Week has passed, officials with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) say motorists always need to be safe and heed all signs in a work zone area.

TxDOT has teamed up with the American Traffic Safety Services Association, the Federal Highway Administration and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation officials who are asking drivers to be cautious when passing through these construction work zones not only for the worker's safety, but also for their own safety as well.

Marc Shepherd, public relations officer for TxDOT, said they placed 154 orange traffic cones outside their office last week to honor those who died last year due to work zone accidents in Texas.

He said motorists can face more risk in a work zone area than the crews working on the roadway.

"It's not just the workers who die in these accidents, but it is the motorists too.

John Barton, TxDOT district engineer for Beaumont, said their goal is to bring home the idea of driving safe and being cautious of the crews who work out on the roads and to bring everyone home safe each day.

According to TxDOT about 125 people died in work zone traffic crashes in Texas in 2004 and 80 percent of those killed were motorists and their passengers.

Also on any given day, there are more than 1,300 work zones on more than 79,000 miles of Texas roadways.

TxDOT also reminds residents that State law requires motorists to obey all signs in work zones.

Fines for moving violations can be as much as \$400 in construction or maintenance work zones marked with signs indicating that fines double when workers are present.

TxDOT also offers these tips: Motorists should observe all work zone warning signs and keep a safe distance between their vehicle and other vehicles, barriers, workers and equipment. Drivers need to be extra careful when passing through an active work zone at night, pay attention to flaggers directing traffic and merge at the first notice of a lane

closure or change. Also, motorists are reminded not to use cell phones, drink, eat or change radio stations or CDs while going through a work zone.