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## Slow down! Deaths in work zones rising

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Orange cones are blooming on Rockland's roads and highways.

The road construction season has begun, which means drivers need to take it easy in work zones.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, the number of people killed in work zone crashes increased from 989 in 2001 to 1,074 in 2005. Eighty-five percent of those killed were drivers or passengers in the vehicle.

Nationwide, more than 40,000 people are injured each year as a result of crashes in work zones.

The state Department of Transportation said there were 96 intrusions into its construction work zones last year, resulting in 139 injuries and seven deaths.

Greater driver vigilance seemingly is needed to offset so many distractions, like talking on cell phones or watching a DVD.

"There's so many things going on at one time, you just got to slow down," New City resident Bill McCarthy said. "If

### Safety tips

Tips for driving safely in construction work zones:

- Expect the unexpected. Normal speed limits may be reduced, traffic lanes may be changed, and people and vehicles may be working on or near the road.

- Slow down. Speeding is a major cause of work zone crashes. A car traveling 60 mph moves 88 feet per second. If you are going 60 mph and you pass a sign that states "Road work 1,500 feet," you will be in that work zone in 17 seconds.

- Don't tailgate. Rear-end collisions are the most common crashes in highway work zones.

- Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and workers and equipment.

- Pay attention to signs. Some work zones - such as line painting, road patching and mowing - are mobile, moving down the road as the work is done. If you don't see the workers immediately after the warning signs, that doesn't mean they're not there.

- Obey flagmen. A flagman has the same authority as a regulatory sign, so you can be charged with disobeying his or her directions.

- Stay alert and minimize distractions. Avoid changing radio stations or using cell phones.

- Keep with the traffic flow. Merge as soon as possible. Don't drive right up to the lane closure, then try to barge in.

- Schedule time to drive safely and check radio, television and Web sites for traffic information. Check the Web site of the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse - <http://wzsafety.tamu.edu> - for information on work-zone delays throughout the country.

- Plan. Detours are often suggested to help drivers avoid work zones.

you're in a hurry, you're going to have a problem." The retiree, who mostly drives locally, yesterday navigated the small stretch of Middletown Road in downtown Nanuet that is being torn up and rebuilt.

- Be patient. Work zones aren't there to personally inconvenience you. They're working to improve the road and your future drive.

Sources: Federal Highway Administration, state DOT

"You got to be very careful because it isn't you, it's the people behind you who will run into you," said McCarthy, who noted that most work zones provide him with ample warning to reduce his speed and shift to the designated lane.

Anthony Morano, who was part of the road crew working yesterday on Middletown Road a few feet from traffic, said no injuries have occurred since the \$3 million project started in the summer.

The county and Clarkstown hired a private company, Morano Brothers, based in Croton-on-Hudson, to do the work, which includes not only a new roadbed, but new sidewalks, a drainage system, decorative streetlights, crosswalks, curbs and updated signs.

"You get used to it, but you always got to keep your eyes open," said Morano, who is also vice president of Morano Brothers. "Once in a while, a car will hit a cone and the cone will go flying."

Two years ago, the state increased the penalties for those convicted of speeding in work zones. Aside from paying double the fine, individuals can lose their driver's license for 60 days if they have two or more work zone speeding violation convictions.

Stationary work zones are one thing, but Rockland Highways Superintendent Charles "Skip" Vezzetti said drivers also must be alert to mobile construction zones, in which the zones move along with the workers, such as for pothole repair or drainage work.

These zones often lack the same protection for workers. Though flagmen and signs are used to warn drivers about closed lanes, it's neither practical nor time-efficient to put down rumble strips and keep trucks in place to act as buffers.

Naturally, how work zones are set up varies by road, factoring in traffic volume and speeds. However, workers are usually dressed in bright orange sweat shirts and orange hard hats. When possible, work is done at night, such as the road repaving that recently began on the New York State Thruway.

In other cases, the state Thruway Authority and DOT use technology to get the word out. Electronic highway message signs give warnings, highway advisory radio frequencies broadcast work zone information, and real-time construction information is available at [www.travelinfony.com](http://www.travelinfony.com).

Of course, there are those temporary work zones set up by utility crews or landscapers that drivers encounter both on busy streets and in their neighborhoods. Vezzetti said anybody working on a right of a way is required to conform with state law in terms of setting up a

safe work zone. Though it is a continuing problem, he said he has noticed improvement over the years.

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