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Caution urged in roadwork zones

By **DON JACOBS**, jacobs@knews.com
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After being flung through the windshield of a car while directing traffic at a construction site, Dwayne Clemons knows the importance of work-zone safety.

"Watch the signs; watch the speed," the 37-year-old construction worker said. "You've got a block or more of signs before you get to the work zone. Just be patient."

Clemons returned to work last month after missing nine weeks because the driver of a 1992 Geo Metro ignored his orders at Broadway and Magnolia Avenue. He suffered a broken leg and neck and back and facial injuries in the 11 p.m. Jan. 24 crash.

Clemons was on hand Monday to emphasize the need for work-zone safety and the state Legislature's declaration of April 2-6 as Work Zone Awareness Week.

Fred Corum, director of the Tennessee Department of Transportation Region One, said nationwide fatalities in work zones increased 40 percent from 1997 to 2005. A good portion involved teens, he said.

"Every three days, a teenager is killed" in a work-zone crash, Corum said, while seven other teens are injured.

"As you enter construction zones," Corum said, "please remember, it's not just the worker, it's also you, the driver, who could be killed. We ask you to slow down. We ask you to stay alert. We ask you to watch for the flaggers. Expect the unexpected."

Reinforcing the message were Knox County Sheriff Jimmy "J.J." Jones and Knoxville Police Department Deputy Chief Bill Roehl. Roehl noted that 85 percent of those killed in work zones were vehicle occupants.

Since Jan. 1, 2006, Roehl said, Knoxville police have recorded 2,266 work-zone crashes. Three involved fatalities, all along Interstate 40, he said.

Clemons suffers from the crash that sent him flying. He has three more weeks of rehabilitation for his broken lower left leg and his back. The crash, he said, has made him a more alert driver.

"I drive different, period," the father of three said. "I try to watch everything, not just in the work zone."

Clemons said he remembers little of the crash.

"I saw the car coming, but he was slowing down. I turned around, and then I'm in the windshield.

"I felt comforted by something, maybe it was God, and then my co-workers came over and held me and were telling me not to move," he said.

The 48-year-old driver who struck Clemons was charged with drunken driving and vehicular assault. He had been charged the month before on Elm Street with drunken driving, records show.



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