

Use caution through construction zones

By [Nick Worner](#), News Staff Reporter

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MOUNT VERNON — On Wednesday, the Ohio Department of Transportation officially began its 2007 construction season.

In the next eight months, 750 state work zones will be set up across the state. One hundred of these projects will take place on major highways, and 475 more will be devoted to resurfacing and road maintenance projects.

Springboarding off of National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week, which ended Friday, ODOT and the Ohio State Highway Patrol are urging motorists to use caution this spring when navigating the state's many work zones.

"I've seen some pretty bad crashes in work zones," said Lt. Chad McGinty, commander of the Mount Gilead Patrol post. "People are hitting pavers and dumptrucks ... it can be very ugly.

"There is so much going on in these areas ... I think sometimes people see the orange barrels and get lulled into a false sense of security," he added. "There is a lot of stuff going on right beside those barrels and if they clip one it's going to hit something, possibly someone."

According to ODOT, there were 19 fatalities and 2,101 injuries in Ohio work zones in 2006. Nationally, there is one work zone fatality every seven hours. According to the patrol, road crews were present in the work zones for more than one-third of the crashes.

McGinty said drivers should be extra careful when driving through populated work zones, where even a small driving error could endanger the lives of road workers standing only a few feet away.

"For the workers, the barrels are all they have between them and moving traffic," he said. "You really have to be aware."

Often, the most common cause of work zone crashes are drivers who follow too closely, or fail to notice a vehicle slowing down or stopping in front of them.

"Most of the problem comes when lanes are restricted," said McGinty. "People are dealing with flaggers and there isn't much room for error ... then if someone makes a mistake it complicates things even further."

Locally, McGinty added, road work will likely begin soon at Cassell's Crossing. Projects are also scheduled in Morrow County on Interstate 71 as well as state routes 315 and 656.

When driving through a work zone the patrol recommends slowing down, minimizing any distractions and avoiding lane changes. Drivers should also be patient and expect delays.

Both ODOT and the patrol advise motorists to plan ahead for road work and to use a detour if possible.

"Try to find an alternate route if you can," said McGinty. "But at least be aware of the situation before you drive into it."

A 2007 construction brochure can be found at local ODOT district offices; information on work sites can also be found at www.buckeyetraffic.org as well as www.statepatrol.ohio.gov/links.htm.

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