



Work Zone Safety Awareness Week

April 2, 2007 04:46 PM EDT

WORK ZONE SAFETY:

IT'S EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Event today highlighted dangers to motorists and workers from careless driving in work zones

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) today hosted an event to draw attention to the importance of driving safely in work zones. Speakers spoke of the many thousands of people who are killed or injured each year from vehicular accidents in work zones.

"As we can clearly see, working in an active work zone, with trucks and cars passing by all day, is hazardous," RIDOT Director Jerome F. Williams said at today's event, held in the Route 403 Relocation Project work zone on Frenchtown Road on the East Greenwich/North Kingstown line. "Their job is difficult enough without having to worry about the potential for serious injury from a motorist who is driving carelessly in a work zone."

Each year there are more than 1,000 fatalities and 115,000 crashes in work zones, an average of three fatalities and 160 injuries every day. More than 80 percent of the casualties are motorists and their passengers. Work zone fatality rates have stabilized a bit, but continue to rise. According to statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation, there were 1,074 work zone fatalities in 2005 (the most recent year data is available). By comparison, there were 1,068 work zone fatalities in 2004 and 1,028 deaths in 2003. Between 1997 and 2005, there was a 40 percent increase in work zone fatalities.

"The statistics clearly show that public education efforts like this are vitally important," remarked Peter Osborn, Acting Division Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Rhode Island Division. "We need to keep getting the message out. Workers are literally risking their lives to improve our roadways."

The event was held to mark the start of National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week (April 2-6). The theme of this year's awareness week is "Signs of Change," reminding motorists that while work zones may be inconvenient, they are needed to allow construction workers to do their jobs improving the roadways.

"The message is simple: Slow down," noted Bob Kunz, Safety Director for Cardi Corporation, the lead contractor on the Route 403 Relocation project.

The event also featured the announcement of expected overnight closures of I-95 in Providence related to the Iway (I-195 Relocation) project. These special work zones will require motorists driving through Providence on those evenings to take one of many detours being planned. The closures are needed so workers can safely set steel beams across the I-95 for the ramps.

More precise information with exact closure dates and times will be forthcoming in approximately two weeks. RIDOT expects the full closures to take place from late April into early May, with lane restrictions lasting until late June. Additional nighttime closures may take place later in the summer. The work will be done during the overnight hours and all lanes will be opened for the morning commute the following day.

The set up of a work zone is a complicated process that adheres to strict standards set by FHWA. All national safety standards to control traffic through work zones are contained in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. FHWA has responsibility for this document and others that contain the federal standards and guidelines for all work zone safety devices.

RIDOT offers the following tips for safe driving in a work zone:

- Expect the unexpected: Normal speed limits may be reduced, traffic lanes may be changed, and people may be working on or near the road.
- Slow down: Speeding is one of the major causes of work zone crashes.)
- Don't tailgate: The most common crash in a highway work zone is the rear end collision.
- Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and the construction workers and their equipment.
- Pay attention to warning signs that guide you and other drivers to move safely through the work zone.
- Obey road crew flaggers: The flagger knows what is best for moving traffic safely in the work zone.
- Stay alert and minimize distractions: Dedicate your full attention to the roadway and avoid changing radio stations or using cell phones while driving in a work zone.
- Keep up with the traffic flow: Motorists can help maintain traffic flow and posted speeds by merging as soon as possible. Don't drive right up to the lane closure and then try barge in.
- Schedule enough time to drive safely: Expect delays and leave early so you can reach your destination on time. Check radio, TV and websites for traffic information.
- Be patient and stay calm: Remember that work zones are not established to personally inconvenience you.