

**HORSEHEADS** -- Kicking off National Work Zone Awareness Week, officials gathered Thursday to urge motorists to slow down and drive carefully through work zones.

Peter White, Region 6 director for the state Department of Transportation, joined state police Zone Sgt. Wayne Walker and Robert Rook, director of the Associated General Contractors of America for Region 6, at a press conference at the safety office near the Interstate 86 upgrade project.

"Reducing speed and increasing alertness while driving through highway maintenance and construction work zones is essential to the safety of highway workers, motorists and their passengers," White said in a news release. "Following the rules of the road throughout the warm-weather driving season will help ensure that our work zones stay safe, enabling travelers and highway workers to return home to their loved ones at the end of the day."

Designated by the Federal Highway Administration, National Work Zone Awareness week is designed to increase driver awareness and decrease the number of work zones accidents that can cause injuries and fatalities.

In 2006, there were 96 motor vehicle intrusions into state construction maintenance and maintenance work zones, resulting in 139 injuries and seven fatalities, according to the state Department of Transportation.