

Training for Safety

For those who make a livelihood in highway work zones, the office is about to get safer

- By Stephanie Harris, Associate Editor

Our nation's highways see more than 42,000 people lose their lives in roadway-related accidents every year, and more than 1,000 of these fatalities occur in work-zone areas alone.

In the battle to lessen this statistic, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)-under the jurisdiction of Section 1409 of SAFETEA-LU-recently authorized \$17 million in grants to nonprofit and not-for-profit organizations to provide safety training to those who work in work-zone areas to help prevent and reduce injuries and fatalities on our roadways.

The American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA) was awarded a majority \$11.9 million of the \$17 million grant, over a four-year period of time, beginning Oct. 1, 2006. Three other organizations were awarded grant money, including the Laborer's Health and Safety Fund/American Road & Transportation Builders Association (\$4 million), Wayne State University (\$400,000) and the Illinois Institute of Technology (\$750,000). Through the Work Zone Safety Grant, these organizations will work to provide training and develop and implement guidelines that will help improve safety for those who earn a livelihood in work-zone areas.

Under the grant, three different areas of work-zone safety and training will be covered. The first area focuses on highway work-zone worker safety training; the second area will focus on developing work-zone safety guidelines; and the third area will focus on developing those guidelines into safety training for state and local governments, transportation agencies and other groups. ATSSA will be offering training courses in all three of the areas, including nine different courses under Area 1 alone, which will begin in October 2007.

"[The courses] will cover work-zone issues, and the in-classroom training is taught by instructors who have a combination of work-zone experience and teaching experience," Donna Clark, ATSSA's director of training and products, told Roads & Bridges. "We'll start offering these courses in the 16 opportunity states that have been identified by Federal Highway as having a large number of fatalities and injuries and therefore have the greatest chance to have those numbers reduced."

The 16 opportunity states are Alabama; Arizona; California; Florida; Illinois; Kentucky; Louisiana; Mississippi; Missouri; North Carolina; Ohio; Pennsylvania; South Carolina; Tennessee; Texas; and Wisconsin.

While the training will only be offered in the 16 opportunity states at first, Clark expects it to venture into other states beginning in 2008. By year four of the grant, all 50 states should be covered.

Course curriculum

The nine different Area 1 courses ATSSA will offer include a two-day flagger instructor training course; a one-day traffic-control technician training course; a two-day traffic-control supervisor training course; a one-day training course for utility workers; a four-hour course called "What Every Supervisor Should Know"; a one-day nighttime work-zone course; a one-day emergency-control course; a one-day course for law enforcement officers; and an emergency traffic-control course. All of ATSSA's courses have been developed to follow the National Highway Institute's guidelines, and they also are 508 compliant, meaning they meet the Americans With Disabilities Act requirements for the disabled, according to Clark.

The safety training courses will be offered to state departments of transportation, local public officials and contractors-both general and subcontractors. "Basically anybody who touches a work zone in any sort of way is going to be eligible to receive this training," Clark said.

While some states require safety training such as that offered by ATSSA, there is no requirement under the grant for anyone to have to go through the training. It is simply available on a volunteer basis for anybody who works in the roadway construction industry. However, "because of the advanced curriculum and the low cost that it's going to cost per student, people would be crazy not to take advantage of this training," Clark said. "They would have to be anti-safety not to take advantage."

As of now, the FHWA grant is focusing the training on work-zone and temporary traffic-control safety issues. However, the potential exists for other areas of highway safety to eventually be covered, especially under the Area 2 guidelines development portion of the grant.

ATSSA has identified what they consider to be potential subject areas on which to focus, and a committee of industry experts will meet at the ATSSA annual convention in late January to discuss and determine which subject areas should be offered for guidelines development and then turning those guidelines into training. "That could be anything from traffic control, planned design, ITS applications, pedestrian safety or work zones in urban areas," Clark said. "There's a broad range of where we can focus right now."

With a little help from their friends

ATSSA will be working with several different partners over the next four years to help administer and promote the grant. Partners working with ATSSA include JM Morales and Associates, Ernest Huckaby, James Bryden, the National Sheriffs Association and Science Applications International Corp.

The partners will help to ensure that the Area 1 course curriculum covers all information needed for those areas of study. They will then help ATSSA with the delivery of those courses. The partners also will assist in developing guidelines for Area 2 of the grant. For Area 3, they will help with turning those guidelines into course curricula.

There are several other partners who will be assisting ATSSA with marketing and outreach, including the Tree Care Industry Association, the Association of County Engineers, the National Towing and Recovery Association, American Red Cross and the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials.

Throughout the course of the next four years, ATSSA and its partners will be dedicated to keeping those involved with and eligible for the training up to date with the latest grant information. ATSSA's website, www.atssa.com, will have a section dedicated to grant information, including a training course schedule that will list when and where courses will be offered. The website will continue to be updated as more information becomes available.

By the end of the four-year grant period, safety training will be made available to most all who work in temporary traffic-control areas, making their work environment a safer place.

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