

# ROAD WORKER SAFETY TIPS

By Debbie Yokota, ARM, SDRMA Chief Risk Officer



As more and more of Californians take to the road this summer after being held captive by the pandemic, summer is also the time that more and more work zones pop up on interstates, highways, and streets. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2019 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), there were 142 construction worker deaths caused by roadway accidents involving motor vehicles. Of those 81 were collisions with another vehicle, 34 were collisions with objects other than vehicles, and 25 were from non-collision incidents such as overturned or jackknifed vehicles.

Many public agencies have workers who spend a lot of time on the side of the road obtaining water samples, maintaining infrastructure, or treating water for mosquitoes. All of these activities come with their own hazards. The biggest roadside hazards are those you have no control over: DRIVERS.

At a roadside work site, your first priority is to proactively evaluate the situation and think about what could go wrong. Take stock of your surroundings. Can you spot someone going at a high rate of speed? Can you see drivers on their cellphones? If you are in a blind spot, consider how to reposition for greater visibility to drivers. If this is not an option, work with a spotter to notify you if an issue arises.

Here are a few tips for the next time you have workers in the field:

## HAVE A PLAN

Every road construction project or work area near roadways should have a transportation management plan. The plan should consist of a temporary traffic control plan to protect workers by safely conducting traffic around or through the work zone. You should also have a traffic control plan for inside the work zone that manages the flow of heavy equipment, construction vehicles, and workers.

## PROPERLY CONTROL TRAFFIC

The work zone should consist of an advanced warning area with warning signs alerting motorists of upcoming changes in driving conditions, a transition area using traffic control devices for lane closures and traffic pattern shifts, a buffer area, the work area, and a termination area to allow traffic to resume back to normal and a sign indicating that the work zone has ended.

All traffic control devices whether it's cones, barrels, barriers, or signs should comply with the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) along with any state agency requirements.

### **WEAR PROPER SAFETY EQUIPMENT**

At minimum, when working on the side of the road, it is imperative that workers wear an ANSI (American National Standards Institute) approved class II safety vest and, depending on what they are doing, a hard hat as well. A class II vest helps passing drivers identify you at up to 1,000 feet. If you are working at night, consider wearing a class III vest to give that extra bit of visibility that could very well mean the difference between life and death.

### **ALWAYS BE AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS**

First workers should never turn their back on traffic. Also, workers cannot just focus their attention on traffic in these situations. They need to understand the area around them in order to spot non-traffic dangers as well as routes of escape. If there is an out-of-control vehicle coming right at the work site, have your workers scouted where they would go?

By preparing ahead of time for all possible outcomes, workers will be ready to act.

### **SET UP THE WORK ZONE SAFELY**

There are a lot of resources available for work zone safety including how to set up a safe work zone. Here are a few things to consider:

1. Do you have adequate cone spacing?
2. Do you have signage in place notifying drivers that there is a lane closure, or a "flagger ahead" sign?
3. Do you have an adequate number of flaggers? Are your flaggers CDOT Flagger trained?
4. What are you doing for quick stops on the side of the road when obtaining water samples?
5. Does your district trucks have light bars, and are you using cones to help bring attention to your vehicle?
6. Are supervisors trained to set up road closures appropriately?

### **FLAGGERS**

Whenever possible, use flaggers to improve road work safety. Cars driving through work areas tend to slow down more when there is a flagger stopping or slowing traffic. Flaggers also work as the eyes and ears for everyone else. They can notify others if they see that something by using their radio, a whistle, or an air horn.

### **STAY HYDRATED**

Workers performing road construction are susceptible to overexertion and heat-related illnesses. Asphalt absorbs 95% of the sun's rays and asphalt temperatures can easily be 30° F or higher than the surrounding air temperature.

Workers should drink plenty of water or liquids high in electrolytes like sports drinks or coconut water. Workers should also get out of the heat and sun as much as possible especially on extremely hot days to avoid heatstroke, dehydration, and heat exhaustion. 🦊

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