

*the easiest job...*  
*continued from p. 2*

of the day, without any change from the original plan.

The following day the thing is out on the job doing what it was built to do. The engineer, the cop, the bus driver and just about everyone else in the town drives by and sees this thing working fine. The next day the word is out, but it depends on who you're listening to on what the word is. In the Police Department the word is the cop designed it; in the Town Hall the engineer did it, and so on... everyone is patting themselves on the back. At the Budget Committee meeting they ask why we didn't just buy one -- "It would look a lot better."

Pot holes are always good for a laugh. They swallow cars, trucks, and buses, no matter how big they are. "The pot hole in front of my house is big enough to swallow a bus." When you get there you find the gas company has scraped away the one inch overlay to get to a shut-off valve, and left a six inch cover exposed.

Pot hole seems to be a universal word for almost every road problem. If a culvert heaves, "there's a pot hole clear across the road"; if a plank is missing off a wooden bridge, "there's a pot hole in the middle of that bridge"; if there's a hole in the concrete steps leading to the library, I'll be told "there's a pot hole in the steps by the railing." So when someone says "there's a pot hole," don't fill the truck with cold patch and rush out to fix it.

Hiring people to work for the town can be quite a trip. I had interviewed dozens of people for a mechanic's position. Some were good, some were great, some I'm sure were breathing, but they didn't move fast enough to prove it. The one I hired had a resume that should have put him at the right hand of Iacocca. He knew so much about cars and trucks and had so many tools that I thought I would have to put an addition on the garage just to house them. These weren't just tools, they were Snap-On, MAC, Cornwall, all the best. He had gauges, testers, everything the mind could imagine. This guy was going to be a great mechanic.

The first job I gave him was an air leak on a truck brake system. He gave it the quick once-over, and said "It's this valve." We went for a new valve, no good. "The new valve is defective." Well, they have plenty of good ones there, let's just get another. Oh no, another bad valve from the auto parts store.

That continued for four valves. I told Mr. Mechanic I guessed it's not that valve. We finally found the problem elsewhere.

The next job was changing tires. He told me he'd done that 1,000 times so I left him to his own devices. I returned shortly after and found him struggling with the tire. He said he'd taken all the nuts off, but it wouldn't come off the hub. I looked and was shocked to see he hadn't removed the chocks. Things kept getting worse, and came to an end when he drove a truck into the grease pit.

I then made a very smart move -- I hired a farmer to be a mechanic. I've never seen a tractor on the back of a wrecker and with a little bailing wire, farmers can keep most equipment running for years.

Selectmen are a funny lot to deal with. You can get an answer out of one of them, but don't take it to the bank. The only answer that counts is when all three or five, whatever the case may be, get together, hash it out, kick it around, study it, table it, and in a month or two decide to let you handle it the way you think is best.

This is not to say one selectman can't tell you what needs to be done. Many times you'll find they tend to have more things for your crew to do the day after church, lodge meetings, Chamber of Commerce breakfasts or large house parties. Very seldom do you get a long list of things to do after selectmen's meetings. These times are spent on important stuff, such as deciding what color next year's dump sticker will be, or if the new tags the town clerk sells will be shaped like a bone, clover or a dog house. They will not discuss whether you should hire an additional employee or try to find a contractor to plow the new subdivision. That's the type of stuff that gets tabled even if it's December 1st.

They will decide that if the snow and not the plow hits a mail box and knocks it down it's because the post is rotten and it's the responsibility of the landowner to provide a proper supporting structure for the mail box. There are a few exceptions to this rule, such as the selectman's mailbox or any relative, friend, lodge brother, elderly person, secretary, new person who just moved into town, or someone who's lived here for many years and doesn't get much for their tax dollar; or if this is a man or a woman, but this rule is on the books and there will be no exceptions... except the ones stated and the new ones to come along.

Speaking of mail boxes, the only damage they ever sustain is from snow plows. If they fall over in July because of a strong breeze, they're propped up with 2x4s, branches, or yarn just to keep them up until winter. Then the morning after the first snowstorm, the phone rings, "Your !\*@&%! snow plow driver hit my mail box and ruined it." They want a brand new mail

box, a wrought iron post with fancy scroll work and a small but dignified aluminum sign on top. This mail box had been sitting on the same saw horse since the town was rolling snow with a team of horses, but according to the caller, this was just like new, suspended on new pressure-treated timbers, and replacing was the least the town could do. I explain the New Rules that have no exceptions. The caller says, "We'll see about that!" Ten minutes later a selectman calls and strongly suggests that we replace the box because this person has done a lot for the town -- exception # ?

And on it goes, spring, summer, fall and winter. Year after year the Highway Department plugs along doing what needs to be done -- with suggestions that are not acted upon, decisions that aren't made, and rules that are as rigid as cooked spaghetti.

All the while you carry on running the show knowing it's the easiest job in town. It must be the easiest because no matter who the person is, he knows a better way to do it, a more important job that needs doing, and a quicker way to get it done.

If you don't believe it, ask my boss -- the kid over there with the red wagon. He told me we'd better fix that pot hole in front of his house -- it's big enough to swallow a bus.

**The above narrative was written by Chum Cleverly, a New Hampshire Road Agent and member of the Technology Transfer Center advisory board. ■**

## **Work Zone Fatalities Still Climbing**

*Are you and your crew sitting ducks?*

During 1987, 701 fatalities occurred in work zones. This was 10 more than in 1986, a 1.4 percent increase. After a significant rise in fatalities from 489 in 1982 to 703 in 1984, the number has remained relatively stable at about 700 per year for the last 3 years.

Work zone fatalities on the Interstate system have increased from 121 in 1982 to 208 in 1987. In 1987, work zone fatalities on the Interstate system accounted for 30 percent of all work zone deaths [NOTE: this means that you fall within the other 70 percent of all work zone deaths]. By comparison, other Interstate fatalities accounted for less than 10 percent of all highway accidents.

**Quoted from the 1989 Annual Report on Highway Safety Improvement Programs. FHWA, April 1989. ■**