

Highway Workers: Save Yourself

Five key safety strategies for avoiding injury or death in highway workzones.



Working in the road can be a frightening experience but as time passes, it is easy to forget those dangers even though they are still present. Every year, more than 100 workers are killed and 20,000 workers are injured in road construction

and maintenance zones. Follow these five safety strategies to help ensure you and your co-workers make it home safely at the end of each workday.

- 1. Focus on the Traffic.** Remain mindful of your surroundings and keep an eye on where the traffic will be. There may be limited vehicles at times, but this does not mean you are safe. Resist the false sense of security. It only takes a second for a car to hit you.
- 2. Be Seen and recognized as a Person.** To accomplish this, wear all your safety gear properly. Button your vest, wash it often to keep it retroreflective and visible, and discard it after the specified number of times. Communicate with motorists by using easily visible advanced warning signs. Follow the MUTCD requirements and motorists will expect you to be in the road.
- 3. Set up Proper Advanced Warning.** Motorists will not expect you to be in the road. You must tell them, repeatedly, that you will be there. If motorists don't know there is a workzone ahead, they won't be prepared to react or won't have time to. Workzone setup procedures are for the safety of both the motorists and road workers. It is essential you follow the MUTCD guidelines each time you set up, even if your workzone is only going to last a few minutes
- 4. Avoid Internal Dangers.** Equipment within the workzone can be as dangerous as traffic. When setting up the workzone, designate separate areas for equipment and foot traffic to significantly reduce the risk of accidents. In addition, equipment operators and ground-workers need to maintain a constant awareness of one another. If you can't see the other person, stop what you are doing immediately.

- 5. Train, Train, Train.** Highway safety rules and regulations are revised frequently and it's important to stay current on those changes. In addition, retraining refreshes the mind and leads to a heightened sense of awareness.

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More than half of U.S. highway fatalities are related to deficient roadway conditions.

A report conducted by the Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation (PIRE) on behalf of the Transportation Construction Coalition, found several alarming conclusions about deficient roadway conditions:

1. They are a contributing factor in 52.7 percent of the nearly 42,000 American deaths resulting from motor vehicle crashes each year and 38 percent of the non-fatal injuries. This is the single most lethal contributing factor-greater than speeding, alcohol or non-use of seat belts.
2. They cost the U.S. economy more than \$217 billion each year.
3. They impose societal cost of 20 billion in medical costs, \$46 billion in productivity costs, \$52 billion in property damage and other resource costs, and \$99 billion in monetized quality of life costs.
4. They are costing American businesses an estimated \$22 billion of the annual economic cost of motor vehicle crashes involving their employees.

Road officials can use this data to support increased highway department funding for road and safety improvements. The report identified several ways to improve deficient road conditions, such as replacing poles with breakaway poles, using brighter and more durable pavement markings, adding rumble strips to shoulders, installing guardrails, and installing retroreflective signs. More significant road improvements include adding or widening shoulders, replacing or widening narrow bridges, reducing pavement edge drop-offs, and clearing more space adjacent to roadways.

Reference: [The Immense Cost of Deficient Roadway Conditions, Better Roads, August 2008. The full report \(On a Crash Course\): www.transportationconstructioncoalition.org.](http://www.transportationconstructioncoalition.org)