Protecting Workers in Construction Work Zones



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Each year over 20,000 workers are injured and hundreds are killed in road construction work zones. The primary cause of fatalities in work zones include, being run over by equipment used in the work zone, a collision between vehicles or mobile equipment, and being caught-in or struck-by equipment or other objects, such as vehicles driving through the work zone.

What's the Danger?

Hazards in construction zones include:

- Drivers with limited sight distance, for example coming around blind curves or over a hill where work is being done below.
- Not enough signage or information for drivers. Examples include, signs that give vague information, messages that are left up 24/7, and short or non-existent acceleration and deceleration lanes.
- High speed and high traffic volume, and tailgating, aggressive, or distracted drivers.
- Equipment and pedestrian traffic from other workers can make operating equipment, backing up, or releasing a load of rock or hot tar, dangerous and sometimes deadly.

How to Protect Yourself

Protecting workers in a work zone starts with a well-developed traffic control plan and proper placement of flaggers, signage, barriers and traffic barrels, temporary traffic signals and the use of pace or pilot vehicles. This helps to ensure drivers are warned well in advance of upcoming road construction and gives them time to slow down, merge if necessary, and pay attention.

Other protective measures include:

- The use of spotters when backing up and emptying loads.

- Additional law enforcement is needed to help control traffic and enforce violations of work zone rules, such as speeding and tailgating.
- Wearing high visibility clothing as instructed and any other required PPE.
- Starting each day with a pre-shift meeting to discuss what will be happening that day.

Final Word

It may be hard to control the actions of drivers coming through the work zone, but you do have control over your behavior and being aware of safe work zone practices and set up.