

Driving in Construction Zones

Toolbox Talk

Combine the stress of a daily commute with ongoing road construction and you get a set of hazardous conditions for motorists and road workers alike.

Work zones, or "cone zones," are sections of a road that are under construction. They are marked by cones, barrels, signs, signals, or lane changes. These zones must include signs to indicate that it is a construction or work zone, state that "Fines double when workers present", and must include indications for where the zone begins and ends. Even though these zones post road signs warning motorists to slow down and drive with extra caution, many drivers speed up to get through construction as quickly as possible.

Speeding and driver inattention cause most work zone crashes. Per the Federal Highway Administration, rear-end crashes are the most common type of crash in work zones. Most fatal crashes in work zones occur on roads with speed limits greater than 50 mph, in summer and fall, and involve working-age adults.

Drivers are killed in work-zone crashes more often than employees working in them. Whether you are traveling for work or pleasure, consider these tips when driving through a work zone - for your own safety and the safety of the employees who build, repair, and maintain roadways.

- Plan ahead - use an alternate route when possible.
- Be courteous and patient, and slow down for road employees. They may be working in conditions with low visibility, congestion, or inclement weather.
- Pay full attention to the roadway - don't distract yourself with cell phones, music, navigation systems, or other non-driving tasks.
- Watch for the orange and black signs that give warnings and information.
- Obey the posted speed limit - employees or equipment may be only feet away from your vehicle, and traffic fines can double in construction zones when employees are present. Respond promptly to flaggers and road employees.
- Increase your following distance behind other vehicles - don't tailgate.
- Stay alert and watch the brake lights on vehicles ahead.
- Avoid abrupt driving maneuvers.
- Be extra cautious when you encounter abrupt lane elevation changes, degraded pavement surface quality, and pavement that ends - these can cause you to lose control. Motorcyclists and bicyclists traveling through work zones should be particularly alert to these dangers.
- Change lanes only where pavement markings or signs indicate it is allowed, and only when traffic conditions permit.
- Be aware that traffic patterns can change daily.
- Expect the unexpected - other vehicles or equipment could enter your lane with little warning.
- Merge into the proper lane well before you reach a lane closure.
- Use your turn signals.
- Turn on your headlights to make your vehicle more visible.
- Turn on your emergency flashers if you come to a full stop.
- Never respond to road-ragers - give them plenty of space.

