



## **Oklahoma Turnpike Authority**

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## **TRAFFIC CONTROL KEY TO SAFE WORK ZONES ON TURNPIKE**

Safety and mobility is paramount in any construction project. Providing notification and proper traffic control of an upcoming work zone can prevent unnecessary crashes—both primary and secondary. It can also be crucial in protecting workers within that zone.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, in conjunction with designers and staff, believe proper traffic control can make all the difference on whether a construction zone is successful.

In the United States, the risk of death for roadway workers is seven times higher than an average worker's risk. Even so, more drivers and passengers are killed and injured in roadway work zones compared to workers. Some 42 percent of work zone crashes occur in the transition zone prior to the work area. This emphasizes the importance of effective traffic control design, deployment, and maintenance in this critical area.

"It can be argued that traffic control is the most important part of the job when thinking about safety aspects," said David Murdock, Chief Engineer for the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority. "It is the sole source of communication with our customers driving through a work zone."

Some simple steps during planning, can save lives and time during the project.

Traffic control should be installed correctly by design and contract specifications. Any deviation should be designed and submitted for consideration and possible approval. Any deviations can lead to dangerous conditions.

All traffic control devices should be in good, sound condition and meet the reflective standards set forth. Signs that are blown over, should be quickly fixed. Barrels hit by vehicles should be replaced.

Traffic control should also be monitored on a continuous basis.

"Traffic Control is the first and last defense we have in an effort to protect our workers and the traveling public," said Mark Kalka, Director of Maintenance for the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

In Oklahoma in 2012, work zone accidents killed 16 people and injured 838 in 1,431 collisions. This marked the greatest amount of injuries and the third highest number of work zone collisions in the past decade.

This is a nearly 78 percent increase in fatalities and a 149 percent increase in the number of accidents in work zones since 2003. The greatest number of collisions resulted from following too close, traveling at unsafe speeds and driver distractions.

"Safety of our employees in the work zone is our number one priority as a highway contractor. We want everyone to end their shift safely and with no accidents of any kind," said Rod Abbott, Vice President of Construction for Sherwood Construction Company. "Traffic control is one of the most important components in creating and maintaining that safe environment for those employees."

The Turnpike Authority, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, began surveillance of work zones several years ago. This has helped increase motorists awareness and decreased the number of accidents within a work zone. Now, all projects on the turnpike system have law enforcement and team work is the number one goal between contractor, OTA and OHP.

"Our presence in these work zones is to ensure the motorists traveling the turnpike systems have a safe trip," said Lt. Mike Yelton, with the Oklahoma Highway Patrol. Lt. Yelton oversees construction projects for the OHP on the Turner, Cimarron and Kilpatrick Turnpikes in Central Oklahoma. "We are present in these work zones to ensure that laws are being observed by all, not just to enforce those laws."

Designers should also work closely with OTA staff, make notes and update designs on a continuous basis to improve project safety. OTA engineers also ask designers and contractors to be familiar with the Human Factors chapter of the AASHTO's Highway Safety Manual.

"Traffic control is a breathing animal," Murdock said. "Signs that don't apply to the project at a particular point in time, need to be covered or even removed from the project."

Advanced warning is key in any construction project to provide safety to workers and the traveling public. A little planning ahead of time, can save time, money and potentially lives during the project.