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## **Safety: It's Not Just About You; work zone safety impacts everyone**

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Whether a highway work zone is temporary for a few hours for maintenance or in place for an extended amount of time for construction, the potential dangers to motorists and workers are the same. With overall highway fatalities on the rise last year, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority want to remind motorists to put away distractions, give space to others and slow down in work zones.

The two agencies are placing additional emphasis on work zone safety through a public campaign April 4-15, which includes the National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week of April 11-15. This safety effort leads to the summer driving season when ODOT and OTA anticipate 275 work zones will be in place statewide as the agencies work to improve our highways.

In the past five years, 91 people, including one ODOT worker, were killed and 1,455 people were injured in more than 8,000 collisions in Oklahoma work zones. Preliminary figures show 20 people were killed from January-September 2021 in work zones. Even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 when traffic volumes significantly decreased, work zone fatalities did not lessen with 19 motorists losing their lives that year.

"The impact of each of those deaths ripples through our communities, leaving loved ones to face these incredible losses," said Secretary of Transportation Tim Gatz. "We want each motorist to take this year's work zone safety campaign theme of 'Safety: It's Not Just About You' to heart and remember it every time they get behind the wheel. The simple steps of buckling up, paying extra attention and slowing down in work zones can save lives."

Events for the 2022 Work Zone Safety Awareness campaign include:

- **April 4-15:** Gov. Kevin Stitt proclaiming these two weeks as Oklahoma Work Zone Awareness Weeks;
- **April 4:** A new work zone safety Public Service Announcement debuted at the Oklahoma Transportation Commission and will be made available to statewide television stations. Watch the PSA here: <https://vimeo.com/693078470>
- **April 12:** ODOT crews will join Oklahoma Work Zone Safe and Oklahoma Challenge for a student safety day at the Chisholm Trail Technology Center to share the importance of work zone safety with teen drivers;

- **April 13:** Oklahoma Transportation invites the public to join workers in wearing orange and sharing their selfies with @OKDOT and @OKTurnpike on Twitter and Facebook
- **April 13, 14:** The Skydance Bridge over I-40 in Oklahoma City will glow orange both nights in honor of the 91 people killed in work zone collisions during the past five years; and
- **April 15:** The two agencies will offer a moment of silence event at ODOT's Central Office in Oklahoma City to remember and honor ODOT's and OTA's 72 fallen workers.

Nearly 35 percent of work zone fatalities in 2019 involved a commercial motor vehicle, leading to Oklahoma ranking ninth nationally for fatal crashes, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

"One area of work zone safety often overlooked by motorists is the need to give more space to large trucks and equipment, which require more time and distance to slow down," said ODOT Chief Engineer Brian Taylor. "Oklahoma is already the crossroads of the nation for commercial motor vehicles, and we expect large truck traffic volume to continue to increase in coming years. That means it's critical for motorists to be aware of the challenges truck drivers face in maneuvering large vehicles, especially in work zones where lanes may be narrower or may be shifted into temporary configurations. By increasing awareness of large truck needs and asking truck drivers to slow down, we hope to reverse this trend and see fewer deadly crashes in work zones."

The two agencies launched a new website at [www.DriveSafelyOklahoma.com](http://www.DriveSafelyOklahoma.com) on Monday to provide motorists with more work zone and seat belt safety information.

Another work zone safety program supported by ODOT is [www.WorkZoneSafe.com](http://www.WorkZoneSafe.com). This is a free, online safety program for teen drivers to learn safe work zone navigation and shares workers' personal stories. Students who take the 30-minute online course are entered into a monthly drawing for a \$500 educational scholarship provided by the Association of Oklahoma General Contractors. More than 1,100 students have learned more about work zone safety since the program's launch in summer 2021.

One of the best ways to stay safe in work zones is to plan travel routes ahead of time and use real-time travel tools such as the Drive Oklahoma mobile app or [www.oktraffic.org](http://www.oktraffic.org) to see where delays are occurring so that motorists can look for alternative routes.



Nearly 35 percent of work zone fatalities in 2019 involved a commercial motor vehicle, leading to Oklahoma ranking ninth nationally for fatal crashes, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Motorists are reminded to give extra space to trucks and large equipment in work zones.



In the past five years, 91 people, including one ODOT worker, have died in work zone collisions. The Skydance Bridge over I-40 in Oklahoma City will glow orange the evenings of April 13 and April 14 in honor of those killed in Oklahoma work zones as part of Oklahoma Work Zone Awareness Weeks, April 4-15.