



Construction season begins, caution needed behind the wheel

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Illinois Department
of Transportation

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois State Police and the Illinois Tollway were joined by industry partners and frontline construction workers today to remind the public that construction season has arrived and extra caution will be required in work zones. In support of the effort, Gov. Bruce Rauner has proclaimed April 3-7 as “Work Zone Safety Week” in Illinois.

“If you are driving in Illinois this year, you will be driving in our work zones. We are striving to make this construction season the safest one ever and drive traffic fatalities in Illinois to zero,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blakenhorn. “Please, if you are traveling through a work zone, slow down, avoid distractions in your vehicle and pay special attention to your surroundings. One life lost is one too many.”

The theme for this year's National Work Zone Awareness Week is "Work Zone Safety is in Your Hands," reinforcing the message that driving habits impact the well-being of other motorists, cyclists, workers, and pedestrians. When you choose to put aside distractions, you gain the ability to save a life, perhaps yours.

"The ISP is committed to the safety of construction workers and motorists on Illinois roadways," said state police Director Leo P. Schmitz. "While traveling through construction zones, we want to remind drivers to obey work zone speed limits, pay attention to the road and put the cell phones away. We will be present in work zones throughout the construction season enforcing distracted driving laws. Motorists need to focus on the construction zone and that alone."

To better alert drivers when they are about to enter a work zone, IDOT this year is deploying portable rumble strips in select spots throughout the state. The department is also expanding the use of speed indicator boards and Smart Work Zones, which rely on sensors to relay traffic flow conditions via digital message boards in advance of work zones.

A renewed focus by IDOT, the Illinois Tollway and the state police will be on specialized "wolf pack" patrols to enforce the rules of the road around work zones. Troopers also will be stepping up the use of photo enforcement vans to ticket drivers who are not obeying work zone speed limits.

More than 4,800 motor vehicle crashes on average occur in Illinois work zones every year. Provisional data shows that 44 people were killed in Illinois work zone crashes in 2016, including one worker.

To promote safety in the field, IDOT is working with its industry partners to host "tailgate talks" at project locations throughout the week. The discussions with workers are refreshers on work zone protocol to encourage safety throughout the construction season. In addition, a media campaign will last through the fall featuring the Seymour Signs character encouraging drivers to "See orange. Slow down. Save lives."

This Friday, Laborers will continue their tradition of staffing rest areas across the state and distributing materials that stress the importance of safe driving through work zones.

"We're reminding drivers to slow down and take extra precautions when they travel through work zones to protect construction workers, emergency responders, other motorists and themselves," said Illinois Tollway Executive Director Greg Bedalov. "Even if no workers are present, drivers are required to follow posted speed limits in construction zones and to be alert for changing road and traffic conditions. To be safe,

drivers need to pay attention to the road, not their cellphones, so we're reminding our customers that using a hand-held cellphone while driving is not just dangerous, it's illegal."

In recent years, Illinois has strengthened laws to increase safety in work zones. Fines for speeding in work zones are \$375 for first-time offenders and \$1,000 for a second offense. The penalty for hitting a worker is a fine of up to \$10,000 and 14 years in prison.

To learn more work zone rules and driving tips, an online quiz is available at idot.illinois.gov.