



Construction Season Arrives, “Don’t be that Driver” in Work Zones

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois State Police and the Illinois Tollway were joined by their industry partners today to kick off National Work Zone Awareness Week and to make a request to motorists: "Don't Be That Driver." To signal the start of construction season and call attention to this important issue, Gov. Bruce Rauner has proclaimed April 11-15 as "Work Zone Safety Week" in Illinois.

"Spring is here and that means construction season is underway in Illinois," said Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blankenhorn. "If you are on our roads, you will be driving through work zones. We ask you to be constantly alert and aware of your surroundings. The rules are very simple: See orange. Slow down. Save lives."

The theme for this year's National Work Zone Awareness Week is "Don't Be That Driver," reinforcing the message that driving in and around highway construction sites requires special attention. Lane closures, changes in traffic patterns, reductions in the speed limit and the presence of workers and equipment create an environment that demands drivers refrain from behavior that could create a distraction. According to recent studies, drivers engaged in activities other than driving, such as eating, grooming or using a mobile device, are up to four times more likely to be involved in a crash.

"Every day, first responders, highway workers, and those who assist stranded motorists place their lives in harm's way to ensure safe travel for Illinois citizens. Scott's Law, the Move Over Law, helps keep those people and motorists safe by requiring extra distance between workers and approaching vehicles," said Illinois State Police Director Leo Schmitz. "Please give them room to work. Always reduce your speed and be prepared to stop when entering a work zone. If you see flashing lights up ahead, slow down and move over."

This year, IDOT and the Illinois Tollway will be continuing their use of Smart Work Zones. The system utilizes roadway sensors to relay travel times via digital message boards in advance of a work zone so motorists are aware of any backups and can seek alternate routes. Speed indicator boards will be deployed again this year to increase awareness of work zone speed limits.

"We will be using all of our advanced technology to make our work zones safe," said Illinois Tollway Executive Director Greg Bedalov. "We ask drivers to do their part as well, including allowing extra time for their trips and then being prepared in work zones for sudden stops, changing traffic patterns, uneven pavement and the presence of workers or construction equipment near the roadway. Drivers who are distracted by hand-held cellphones or other electronics are not only endangering themselves and others, they are breaking the law."

To promote safety in the field, IDOT is working with its industry partners to host 10-minute "toolbox talks" at project locations throughout the week. The discussions are intended to be refreshers on work zone protocol to encourage safety throughout the construction season.

The public is encouraged to take an online quiz about work zone rules and driving tips by visiting the main IDOT page at idot.illinois.gov. You also can learn more about work zone safety by visiting EmbraceTheOrange.com.

More than 4,300 motor vehicle crashes on average occur in Illinois work zones every year. Provisional data shows that 46 people were killed in Illinois work zone crashes in 2015.

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. The use of all hand-held electronic devices while driving at all times is prohibited.

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