

Three tips for better work zones

Basic work zone traffic control training reached more than 500 people this spring. Local government, utility, and contractor employees attended 20 one-day workshops offered by the T.I.C. around the state. Many other workers got refreshers in work zone traffic control during spring safety days. The programs were based on the T.I.C.'s pocket-sized guide, *Work Zone Safety*. Nearly 18,000 copies of the guide have been distributed since its publication in June 1999.

The training and guide are designed to improve safety by helping people who set up work zones give clear, safe guidance to motorists and pedestrians traveling through them. A well laid out work zone also improves worker safety by creating a buffer between them and traffic. Work zone layout requires using judgement and care in applying the guide at each site. Three basic steps will improve work zone traffic control programs.

Use only approved devices. Meeting the minimum requirements for traffic control devices is essential. Sometimes a safe and effective work zone set-up requires more devices, more expensive devices, or devices in better condition than a crew has on hand. The lack of approved devices may be due to budget constraints, lack of knowledge, or poor work planning.

Incorrect or poor quality traffic control devices should not be used, no matter what the reason. Supervisors should regu-

larly evaluate the inventory and condition of their temporary traffic control devices, determine if different or additional devices are needed, and prepare a budget or purchasing proposal to upgrade, expand, or replenish the devices.

Use approved devices in an approved way. The *Work Zone Safety* guide is filled with specific requirements such as sign spacing; sign size, shape, color, mounting height, and wording; taper lengths; and buffer lengths. Applying these requirements takes judgement because the actual conditions at the work site must govern the set-up. Traffic speed, traffic volumes, the number of trucks, sight distances, obstructions, conflicts, duration of the work, specific location of the work, and the nature of the work itself make each set-up a new problem to solve.

Those responsible for the work zone setup need to do a field inspection before work starts to identify how to best set up the work site and the traffic control. Work zone traffic control should be part of the work planning, not an afterthought. After



Setting up work zones takes the right equipment, judgement, and inspection.

the initial setup, supervisors should drive the work zone in both directions to verify that it gives the motorist clear guidance.

Inspect, maintain, and modify when needed. Once the work site is operational, observe traffic flow during various traffic conditions such as during rush hour or at night, and periodically drive the work zone. Look for evidence of specific problems: skid marks, panic stops, drivers confused by the set up, unnecessary slow downs, missing or misplaced devices.

Should there be a crash, evaluate it to see if the traffic control set up could be adjusted to improve safety. Make the modifications that are necessary and continue to observe and inspect. File away what you've learned to help set up the next site.

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