

For safety's sake, train flaggers

People sometimes think the flagger's job is a "no-brainer." As a result, it may be assigned to the least experienced person on the crew, or as an afterthought without much preparation. They forget that the flagger is in charge of safety—for the crew, for him/herself, and for road users passing through the work zone.

The death of a county worker last February, struck by a vehicle while flagging, is a sad reminder of the job's hazards. "It's essential that flaggers be properly trained and equipped because they have a tremendous responsibility to protect the rest of the crew out there," says Bob Fasick, WisDOT Highway Operations Engineer. Fasick assists the T.I.C. in developing Flagger Training workshops and the *Flagger's Handbook*.

Thinking ahead is critical. Supervisors and lead workers need to recognize that any job may require a flagger. They should identify trained flaggers on each crew, know how to call one in from another job if needed, or hire a flagging contractor. Their trucks should be stocked with the proper advance warning signs, STOP/SLOW paddles, cones or barricades, and high visibility clothing. They also need some type of written guidance or plan.

Many different forms of guidance are appropriate such as the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) Part 6*, the *Work Zone Safety* pocket guide, and the *Flagger's Handbook*. The latter two are available from the T.I.C., and were developed from the *MUTCD*. Some agencies may develop their own guidance which should also be based on the *MUTCD*. "Whatever the source, it's important to have a written plan," says Fasick.

Every worker who might possibly be assigned to do flagging should receive proper training. They will learn about

placing signs and cones, where to position themselves, and how to give clear messages to road users.

"We find that flaggers are using signals and positions differently and/or incorrectly, and that's a problem," says Jim Schneider, former head of traffic operations for the City of Milwaukee who teaches Flagger Training and Work Zone Safety for the T.I.C. "Everybody knows what the STOP/SLOW paddle means, but if the flaggers don't use positions and signals consistently, how can drivers learn what we expect of them?"



Could this flagger escape?



With no safety equipment, flagger is at risk.

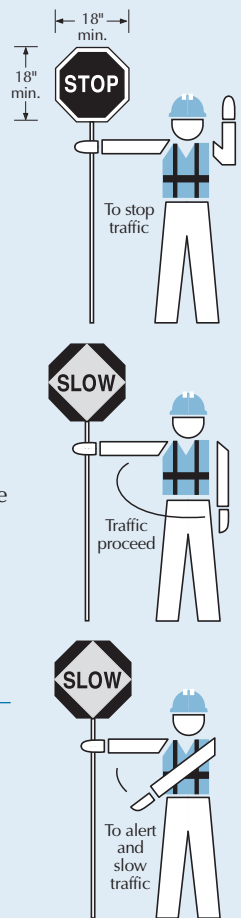
Flaggers can learn proper procedures from videos, from other employees who have been trained, and in workshops. In addition to Flagger Training workshops, the T.I.C. offers to "train the trainer," preparing supervisors, safety officers, and lead workers to teach flagging to their crews.

On the job, flaggers need frequent breaks to help them stay alert and attentive to the traffic. Supervisors should rotate flaggers among different positions and out for breaks, and also spot check for safety compliance.

Safety tips for flaggers

"A flagger must start by standing on the shoulder and not in the travel lane," says Fasick. When they need to move to the center of the road, they should only do so after the first vehicle is stopped and the following vehicles are also stopped or slowing down. "Flaggers have been struck and killed because the second vehicle swerved to avoid the first vehicle that had properly stopped. In one incident, the second vehicle pushed the first into the flagger and killed her," he adds.

Flaggers must be visible. They cannot have any work equipment or vehicles near them. If a flagger stands next to his/her vehicle on the side of the road there is no easy escape route.



Advance warning signs are required, even for a five-minute truck crossing situation. At least two signs are required in low speed (25-30 mph) urban areas, and at least three for all other locations. Cones or barricades are also required in most flagging situations in a taper ahead of the work area.

When the flagging stops, even briefly, certain signs must not be used any more. For example, the "Flagger" and "ONE LANE ROAD AHEAD" signs are to be removed, covered, or laid flat, but the "ROAD WORK AHEAD" sign may still be needed. Leaving the wrong signs up without a flagger teaches motorists to ignore the signs.

Make safety a top priority for work zones, and start with trained, equipped, and effective flaggers.



Is this flagger alert to traffic?

For training videos and copies of the *Work Zone Safety* pocket guide or the *Flagger's Handbook*, see Resources page 6. To inquire about Flagger Safety workshops, contact the T.I.C. at 800/442-4615