



CROSSROADS

<http://tic.engr.wisc.edu>

WISCONSIN TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION CENTER - LTAP



"You can't safely do both flagging and road work alone."

Work zone traffic control and the real world

by Jim Schneider and Don Gordon
Work Zone Safety Instructors

FOLLOWING are some questions and comments from the January 2005 Work Zone and Flagger Safety TIC workshops.

• I am a flagger and our work sometimes involves a moving work operation. Where should I park my truck?

The flagger stands alone. Parking the truck nearby may block the escape route if he/she has to jump out of harm's way. It also clutters the scene, making the flagger less visible to vehicle drivers.

• I am the only person in the town who does minor work on town roads. If I had to flag traffic while I closed one lane for my work, I'd have to do it myself. Sometimes my wife acts as a flagger while I work.

First, if your wife is not a town employee she is taking a big risk. She is not covered by the town's liability or accident insurance. Second, you can't safely do both flagging and road work alone; doing it that way creates a liability risk situation for yourself and the town. Besides, there are other options. The *Work Zone Safety* handbook has setups that don't require a flagger for traffic control on two lane, low speed, low volume roads with good sight distance. For conditions with higher speeds, higher volumes, or limited sight distance, the town may have to hire someone to do flagging, or you could ask for help from the county.



• I am a flagger and I use my cell phone for emergency work assignments and for personal calls.

• I use a tripod to hold my flagger paddle and sit in my truck listening to music while I wait for traffic. It sure makes the job easier!

The *Flagger's Handbook* says not to use walkmans or tape recorders, or read books while on duty. This applies to cell phones, too. Using a tripod may be okay if it is crashworthy but it definitely must be attended. Sitting in a truck listening to music is inappropriate. Besides, the truck should be well away from the flagger's position, parked down the road and at least 20-30 feet off to the side, away from the traffic lane.

• We usually sealcoat one lane of a two lane road at 15 mph. Since the flagger can not walk that fast, he follows in his truck and controls traffic from inside it.

This is not an appropriate use of flagging. Flagging operations are designed to function at the walking speed of a person, about 3 mph. You can use different mobile operation setups described in the *Work Zone Safety* handbook (pp. 44-52) for this situation.

• I'm often the only worker on site. I like to position my truck in the roadway as a barrier between traffic and me.

Many people wrongly believe that they can protect themselves by parking a truck between them

Continues page 4

INSIDE

- 2 "Super tanker" truck
- 2 Stop signs upgraded
- 3 Curb ramps
- 5 Editorial . . . work that closes a traffic lane
- 6 RESOURCES
- 6 Weed/culvert timeline
- 7 Highway Watch® seeks observers
- 8 Spring bridge checkup
- 9 10 tire tips
- 10 Crossroads Index—Spring 03—Winter 05
- 11 Eliminating blind zones
- 12 CALENDAR

Work zone traffic control and the real world

continued from page 1



These signs cannot be used interchangeably.

and traffic. In reality, if a vehicle strikes the truck, it will be pushed right into the worker. Depending on traffic speed, a truck with locked brakes will cover 100-275 feet when it's hit (the "roll-ahead distance"). Your municipality is exposing itself to liability by not spending the money to give you the proper protection. When working alone park well off the shoulder and set up proper signing and lane controls.

- *We have RIGHT LANE CLOSED and LEFT LANE CLOSED signs but no ONE LANE ROAD signs. Can't we use what we have on a two lane road, in a flagger set-up?*

No. On a two lane road there is no right or left lane. Buy some ONE LANE ROAD signs.

- *If work is suspended for a short period, such as when the flagger takes a rest break or lunch break, do we really have to remove, cover, or lay flat the FLAGGER and the ONE LANE ROAD signs?*

Yes. The *MUTCD* is very specific on this point. It became a standard with the 2000 edition: "All signs that are no longer appropriate shall be turned, covered, removed, or laid flat." We've all driven by FLAGGER AHEAD signs for several days and there has been no flagger. Then when the flagger finally shows up, no one

pays attention to the signs. You may see this as a waste of time, but it is an important safety and liability issue.

- *All of our warning lights flash. Can we still use them for isolated hazards and in tapers?*

- *We only have steady burn warning lights. Can't we use them for isolated hazards anyway?*

No. The *MUTCD* is very specific on when to use the different light modes. Flashing lights should be used for isolated hazards and not in a series. Steady burn lights are used in tapers, separations, and delineation. The principle here is that a driver can follow the path defined by a line of steady burn lights but will likely be confused by a bunch of flashing lights. You can buy lights which switch from steady to flashing. Go order some.

- *I was never given a copy of the MUTCD and do not have access to one. Do I really have to follow it? Who enforces it?*

- *When I started this job four years ago my predecessor pulled out his copy of the 1988 MUTCD. That is all I have.*

- *My town did not buy the 2000 MUTCD because it would soon be replaced by the 2003 edition. I am still using the 1988 edition.*

Ignorance is not an excuse. The state has adopted the current *MUTCD*. It's the law of the land, and you have no excuse for not following it. As far as enforcement, there are no *MUTCD* police. Enforcement is the responsibility of the roadway authorities who often don't do it. Usually the legal system ends up enforcing it through liability lawsuits. The TIC has resources to help you understand and use the *MUTCD*. (See margin page 5).

- *Our company does crack sealing. We use a truck with a hand-held wand to clean the cracks, followed by a truck that fills them. This operation is followed by a flagger who maintains a line of cones across the roadway. As the filler sets-up, the flagger (with his back to traffic) moves the cones to the next filled crack while maintaining the one way traffic operation.*

Cones are for a stationary operation. It's not appropriate to use cones to close a traffic lane for a mobile flagging operation. Also, the flagger's duty is to watch traffic. If his back is turned and he's doing something else, he is no longer controlling traffic.

For this type of situation, you should follow the guidelines for a mobile operation on a two lane road (*Work Zone Safety* handbook page 49). Always use the required advance warning signs and reposition them periodically as the operation moves. Two flaggers are recommended. However, you might manage with one flagger if the work area is short, the road is straight and low volume, and the flagger is visible from both directions of traffic. The single flagger should be on the shoulder opposite the active area of the work, not behind the truck.



- *I understand that the **Work Zone Safety** handbook applies to any roadway open to public travel, but don't the **MUTCD** and the **Wisconsin Supplement** only apply to state highways and Interstates?*

This is a mistaken idea that keeps circulating. People think that because the **MUTCD** is a federal document it only applies to Interstates, and that the state supplement only applies to state roads. Wrong.

The **MUTCD** applies to any road open to public travel; the Supplement makes it stronger and more specific to Wisconsin. State adoption makes them both the law everywhere in the state. Also, TIC publications like **Work Zone Safety** are intended to help local agencies understand and use the federal and state manuals. They do not replace them!

- *What is the proper use of an advisory speed plaque? What process is required to post them? In particular, is an engineering study required?*

A work zone should be designed to inhibit traffic as little as possible, preferably so that motorists do not have to reduce their speed more than 10 mph. When you do post an advisory speed plaque, you need an engineering study and approval from the agency responsible for the roadway (except in an emergency). You don't need a special consultant for an "engineering study," just someone who is knowledgeable in work zone requirements, and the construction project and work site. If approved, reduce speed in 10 mph increments. Never post a black on orange speed plaque alone. Always post it below a warning sign.



Editorial

Snow removal (and other work that closes a traffic lane)

by Don Gordon, Work Zone Safety Instructor

Often during Work Zone training sessions someone will describe what they do to pick up snow and how they do it now, followed by "how should we be doing this?" What they are really looking for is someone to tell them that there is a way to close a traffic lane without following the Standards and Guidance in the **MUTCD**. Often the methods that are described do not come close to meeting the requirements for Temporary Traffic Control.

Regardless of the type of work to be done the Standards are the same. A half road closure is a half road closure; if you are removing snow, building a sewer, paving a road, or whatever, it doesn't matter.

There are Options depending on many varying circumstances. Can the street be closed completely? Can one direction be diverted to a different route? Can the work be done as a "mobile operation" or should it be done as a flagging operation? If there are traffic signals will drivers still be able to recognize a red or green indication when they are in a part of the road that the signals are not focused for?

Once the method that best fits the needs and requirements is selected, it is a matter of applying the appropriate traffic control procedures, the same way it should be done for any type of work requiring a road, street or highway closure.

With significant differences between village, town and city; vehicle mix, traffic volume, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic; and the time of day the work is to be done, it is impossible to give any answer other than to follow the suggested Typical Application Diagrams based on the Standards, Guidance and Options in the **MUTCD**, the **Wisconsin MUTCD Supplement** and the **Wisconsin Work Zone Safety** handbook.

There are no cookie-cutter answers!

"A half road closure is a half road closure; if you are removing snow, building a sewer, paving a road, or whatever, it doesn't matter."

The **Flagger's Handbook** and **Work Zone Safety** pocket guide are free on request and given out in TIC Work Zone Safety and Flagger Training workshops. These programs can be presented at your site and on your schedule. Contact the TIC for more information.

National Work Zone Awareness Week, April 3-9

Sponsored by the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA).
www.atssa.com/public/nwzaw.asp

Training videos The following are just three of 34 tapes in the TIC Videotape Library under the topic of Safety: Work Zone:

Flagging Operations and Procedures, #18610

A Traffic Plan to Live By (series of 13 topics) #17904– #17916

What's Wrong With This Work Zone?, #18410

TIC publications to help with signing/markings questions:

Signing for Local Roads, No. 7

Pavement Markings, No. 9

Setting Speed Limits on Local Roads, No. 21