

Getting unsafe mailboxes off highways

Two WisDOT Districts have taken action to reduce the number of unsafe mailboxes along state trunk highways. In District 4, student engineers spent the summer of 1995 surveying unsafe boxes and supports. They found 1,052 of them that were too heavy, too high, protruding too far into the road, in unsafe bases, etc. On the district's 1,350 centerline miles of road, that's about one every 1.3 miles.

"We left them a letter and pamphlet to let them know they had a roadside hazard," says Dan Grasser, Chief Maintenance and Traffic Engineer, District 4, Wisconsin Rapids. By Christmas 1995 about 500 of the hazardous boxes had been changed. The letter advised homeowners to return an enclosed follow-up card as evidence of removing the hazard. Otherwise, if a crash occurred and the box were unchanged, the homeowner might be liable for damages. Several counties in District 4 have begun a similar effort on their county trunk highways.

"I was impressed with how bad the situation was," says Jim Voborsky, Maintenance Supervisor in District 7, Rhineland. "Over the years we'd been trying to eliminate mailboxes that obviously would kill somebody, but then we decided to bite the bullet and do them all. It was unbelievable! There were a lot more than we had estimated."

Counties in District 7 assigned the job to a patrol superintendent, a beat patrolman, or another worker. On every hazardous mailbox they hung a plastic bag with a letter and informational brochures. The mailbox was photographed and recorded as well. "We put notices on everything that was bigger than the dimension size lumber. I'd guess there were around 1,500 in the eight counties," says Voborsky. District 7's letter also included a return mail form with a deadline for sending it back.

The number of vehicle-mailbox crashes keeps going up across the country. When you start looking systematically at your area's mailboxes you understand why. Surveying the boxes and notifying the owners seems to be the most effective approach to making roads safer.

Contact the T.I.C. for copies of Voborsky's letter and the informational brochures **It's Nice to Be Different**, and **Mailbox Safety**. Mail or fax the form on page 7, call 800/442-4615, or e-mail: ranum@engr.wisc.edu



Top left: Milk can mailboxes may cause rollovers.

Top right: Loosely attached planks can fly through windshields. This one has the District's advisory letter.

Far left: Loose concrete block behind mailbox could easily penetrate car's windshield.

Left: Installing a safe mailbox support is relatively simple.

Writing better bid documents

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sealing phase. Be careful to clearly define the extent of the work and to assign specific responsibility. This will help ensure that bids are fair and competitive.

Specifications All bid documents should require that work be done in conformance with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction. Local officials will need to make some additional specification decisions because the standard has many options, some of which are not appropriate for local roads. For example, the specs say asphalt materials may conform to HV, MV, or LV mix specifications. Most local roads would benefit by conforming to LV (low volume) specifications; materials designed for very high volume roads (HV) are generally not appropriate.

Sample specifications and sample bidding documents for small projects are available through the T.I.C. They were discussed in two ETN training sessions. Audio tapes of both sessions are available. See **Resources** for details.