



ROCK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Highways & Parks

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Rock County Officials Remind Drivers to Stay Safe This Construction Season

Rock County Highway Commissioner, Duane Jorgenson, urges people to drive carefully in road construction and maintenance work zones throughout the 2021 construction season.

“All individuals that perform work on our highways have important roles that are just like anyone else. They want to do a good job and make it safely home to their families at night,” said Jorgenson. “We ask that everyone take extra time and stay alert on the roads.”

In 2020, there were more than 1,800 work zone crashes throughout the state resulting in 665 injuries and 17 fatalities.

In Wisconsin, work zones include major highway construction and rehabilitation, maintenance, emergency response, utility work, municipal projects and more – any time there are flashing lights, signs, barrels or workers on the road.

National Work Zone Awareness Week takes place April 26 through 30. The theme is “Drive Safe. Work Safe. Save Lives.”

Wednesday, April 28, is “Go Orange Day,” in which people are asked to wear something orange in support of highway safety. Social media pictures and posts are welcome using the #OrangeForSafety hashtag.

Work Zone Awareness Week is sponsored by federal, state and local transportation officials to draw attention to the safety needs of road workers during construction season. Generally, crashes occur when drivers speed through a work zone, do not pay attention to changing road conditions, run into other vehicles or highway equipment or drive off the road completely.

“Things happen very fast in work zones, even when the speed limit is reduced,” said Jorgenson. “It’s important to eliminate distractions, slow down and avoid tailgating.”

While typical construction work zones are prevalent throughout the county and state, there are also significant numbers of maintenance operations that may be short-term or moving operations. Drivers are reminded of the state's, "Move Over, Slow Down" law, which requires drivers to shift lanes or slow down in order to provide a safety buffer for a squad car, ambulance, fire truck, tow truck, utility vehicle, or highway maintenance vehicle that is stopped on the side of a road with its warning lights flashing.

Additionally, drivers are reminded that a new law took effect in October 2016 making it illegal to talk on a hand-held mobile device while driving through a work zone. Violators face fines of up to \$40 on first offense and \$100 for subsequent offenses, plus costs.

Before hitting the road, drivers are encouraged to check 511 Wisconsin (511wi.gov and @511WI on Twitter), or use the 511 Wisconsin smartphone app for updates on road conditions and traffic flow.

Giving undivided attention to the road:

- Don't fool around. Eliminate distractions like eating, drinking, talking on the phone, or fiddling with electronic devices.
- Expect the unexpected. Speed limits may be reduced, traffic lanes may be changed, and people and vehicles may be working on or near the road.
- Slow down. A car traveling 60 mph travels 88 feet per second, and the faster you go the longer it takes to stop.
- Give yourself room. Rear-end collisions are the most common work zone crashes, so don't tailgate.
- Allow about three seconds of braking distance. Look for signs. Orange, diamond-shaped signs usually give you ample warning of lane closings, construction areas, and flaggers and other workers ahead.
- Be patient. If you don't see workers, that doesn't mean they're not there. Observe the signs until you see one that says you've left the work zone.
- Plan ahead. Leave early or map out an alternate route. Find the latest road conditions and work zone news at 511 Wisconsin.
- Follow the law. Slow down and move over, if possible, when you see flashing lights.
- Consider turning off the phone until you reach your destination.
- During a long drive, consider leaving a voice mail explaining how long you'll be unavailable.
- If you have to make a call, find a secure place to pull over and stop, such as a wayside or a gas station.

For more information:

<http://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/safety/education/workzone/default.aspx>

<https://www.co.rock.wi.us/highway-work-zone-safety>