

## **Work Zone Deaths a Matter of Speed**

You're driving home from work when you see a construction zone ahead and immediately think "this is going to slow me down."

Perfect, according to state officials, because that's what you should expect.

April 8 begins National Work Zone Safety Week, as federal, state and local authorities raise awareness to the need to slow down and be alert when approaching and passing through work zones.

Statewide, nearly 200 people have been killed and more than 2,200 were injured in work zone crashes over the past decade, including eight people who were killed and more than 100 injured in the Lehigh Valley, according to Pennsylvania's Crash Information database.

Since 1970, 89 PennDOT workers have died in work zone crashes.

"Slow down, stay focused. It's really that simple," said Patrick Wright, a traffic engineer who teaches Work Zone Safety courses at LVPC for PennDOT's Local Technical Assistance Program. "Of course it's important in the big construction projects, but it's even more important in the neighborhood sites where a worker might be patching a pothole or clearing an inlet. Those workers tend to be less protected and closer to the roadway."

Every April since 2000, the Federal Highway Administration and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation have commemorated the week by raising awareness to the dangers of speeding through work zones. With workers near the travel lane, and traffic often slowed or stopped, it's more important than ever for motorists to slow down and avoid distraction. Distracted driving is on the rise and is now blamed for more than 3,000 traffic deaths a year, according to the National Highway Safety Administration.

"The beginning of construction season is a good time to remind motorists about the dangers of work zone driving," said PennDOT Safety Press Officer Sean Brown. "Drivers should be aware that the vast majority of work zone deaths and injuries are to the motorist."

State and federal officials have taken steps in recent years to reduce crash figures. Fines in work zones are doubled and new legislation such as the Steer Clear Law threatens fines of up to \$250 for motorists who don't slow down and move over as they approach an incident with a PennDOT vehicle or emergency responder.

Not only does speed make an accident more likely, but the chance of a death increases dramatically, Wright said. A person hit at 40 mph has an 80% chance of dying, but that chance drops below 10% if the car is only traveling 25 mph.

And soon, it could become a lot more expensive. State legislators last year passed a law allowing automated speed enforcement in work zones along federal highways. It's already being

used on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and is expected to be added along other roadways that include Route 22 and Interstate 78, Wright said. A detection system would record a vehicle speeding more than 11 miles above the work zone limit, take a photo of the license plate and then send a citation in the mail. A first offense brings a warning, a second generates a \$75 fine and every subsequent offense will cost the motorist \$150.

“Speeding through a work zone will maybe save you a few seconds,” Wright said. “It’s just not worth it.”