



Reducing the **risk** in roadwork

The importance of traffic protection for road workers cannot be overstated. According to the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA), over the past decade, there have been more than 8,200 roadwork-related injuries across Ontario in a wide range of categories: falls, overexertion, and being struck by vehicles or equipment among them. Adding to these risks is the fact that Ontario's roadways are seemingly becoming more and more dangerous. In January of this year, for example, Ontario Provincial Police reported a 271-percent increase in fatalities on the province's highways.

We are now fully into road construction season. Across the province, potholes are being filled, bridges built and roads repaved. It's imperative for all companies that work in and around roadways to ensure that traffic protection is a top priority and that an adequate training program is in place. Here are a few tips for ensuring road safety on the job.

Ensure that road workers are familiar with applicable laws and regulations

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the Ontario Regulations for Construction Projects define responsibilities and requirements for working around traffic. Furthermore, the Ontario Traffic Manual Book 7 – Temporary Conditions outlines rules that companies must follow pertaining to work on or near roadways. The manual also provides guidance on creating traffic control plans that allow vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians to move safely and efficiently through work zones.

Ensure that each member of your team is familiar with the manual and has a copy on hand at all times. Consult the manual before stopping a vehicle on or beside a roadway, or when applying any type of traffic control/diversion procedure.

Build traffic control into your health and safety plan

Any company that engages in activities that require work on roadways—including municipal roadways, parking lots, private access roadways, alleyways and any other vehicular rights-of-way—must build traffic control guidance into its health and safety plan. Guidance should focus on ensuring high visibility for drivers and road workers. Be sure to outline best practices such as parking vehicles adjacent to the work area; engaging flashers and beacons; blocking work areas using barriers, barricades or crash trucks (depending on the location, nature and duration of the work); and parking in the same direction as the traffic flow.

The health and safety plan should also provide guidance on clearly identifying the work area through appropriate signage and devices that comply with MTO regulations. Customize guidance to conform to the common types of traffic control layouts required by your projects. For example, if the majority of projects are carried out in congested cities vs. rural areas, or on single vs. multilane roadways, safety requirements will differ.



It's important that road workers are trained to safely setup and take down traffic control devices since driver inattentiveness and excess driving speeds can expose workers to risk. Precautions such as setting up signs off the roadway where possible so that they can be quickly erected on the job site, and parking upstream from a work area can greatly reduce risk. The Ontario Traffic Manual Book 7 provides further guidance on the safe and effective placement of signs and barriers.

Depending on the nature, location and duration of the work, additional protection may be required such as engaging police officers to control traffic.

Create customized, project-specific traffic protection plans

Every project is unique and so are the health and safety hazards they present. Before initiating any project that involves traffic control or proximity to vehicular traffic, complete a customized, project-specific traffic protection plan. Key elements of the traffic control plan should include:

- recording information on the existing road conditions (e.g., paved or unpaved, single or multilane, divided or undivided) in the work area
- recording information on traffic conditions such as the speed limit and volume of traffic
- conducting a hazard assessment that addresses all potential hazards associated with the traffic control set up at that location including pedestrian traffic, weather patterns, visibility, etc.
- creating strategies to mitigate anticipated hazards
- documenting the traffic control procedures and devices required to effectively divert traffic and initiate lane closures
- documenting procedures for safely setting up and removing devices and signage

Equip road workers with a traffic control planning sheet that can be used to document this information prior to initiating work.

Maintain a vehicle safety program

In addition to a health and safety policy and manual, companies that maintain a fleet and engage in roadwork activities should enforce a vehicle safety program. The program should outline, at a minimum, rules and responsibilities with regards to how company vehicles are to be used, accident procedures

and reporting requirements, safe parking protocols, vehicle maintenance requirements, and a substance abuse policy. The program should also mandate daily vehicle inspections.

It's also a good idea to consider establishing a fleet safety committee that is responsible for reviewing accidents and the company's overall driver safety record. Based on this information, the committee could assess whether changes should be made to policies or procedures and whether corrective action should be taken. The committee would also review individual driving records to flag concerns, and ensure compliance with the company's vehicle safety policy.

Enforce a mandatory personal protective equipment policy

When working on any project that requires traffic control, personal protective equipment (PPE) is a must. At a minimum, PPE should include a Class E hardhat, CSA-certified Grade 1 safety boots, reflective safety vests or clothing, and where necessary, eye and hearing protection. Additional high visibility wear such as reflective strips should be applied for night work. Additional PPE may be required depending on the nature and location of the work. Make sure these requirements are clearly stated in your health and safety policy or manual.

A final thought

As our roads, streets and highways become more and more congested, roadwork is one of the riskiest activities that companies can engage in today. An ounce of prevention can reduce risk, however, simply documenting useful information will not be effective without a training program in place.

As per the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, ensure that all field workers and supervisors receive health and safety awareness training at the start of employment. Make sure that every employee is trained on your company's health and safety policy or manual including aspects related to traffic control, traffic protection and vehicle safety. Build refresher training into the program and promote regular safety or tailgate talks to review details of traffic control and protection plans for each project.

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