



## Drivers and occupants most at risk in construction zone mishaps; National Work Zone Awareness Week kicked off

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A century of dedication and hard work was recognized at gatherings in Tulsa and Oklahoma City Friday as the Oklahoma Department of Transportation not only marks 100 years of service to the traveling public, but also reminds motorists of the importance of added caution in construction zones.

Now, more than ever, with faster travel speeds and technologies such as cell phones and other mobile devices, drivers and passengers are more at risk for injury and death, especially in work zones.

Statistics show that four out of five of those killed in work zones are motorists and passengers in vehicles traveling through the work zone, indicating that the way you drive in work zones has a direct effect on your own safety, as well as the safety of the workers.

Nationwide, 667 people were killed in highway work zone collisions in 2009, the most recent year of available complete statistics. In Oklahoma, 18 people lost their lives between January and November 2010.

Also in 2010, preliminary figures show that 748 people were injured in 1,407 collisions in Oklahoma work zones – the highest number of work zone collisions and greatest amount of injuries in the last decade. Many of those collisions resulted from following too closely, traveling at unsafe speeds and driver inattention, including the dangerous habit of talking or texting on a cell phone or other mobile device.

On a national level, Work Zone Awareness Week takes place April 4-8. This year's theme is "Safer driving equals safer work zones – for everyone" and highlights the need for caution on the road and especially through construction areas.

In Oklahoma, to emphasize the seriousness of the situation, those involved with work zones and roadway safety gathered in Oklahoma City and Tulsa to kick off the annual focus on roadway safety.

"In this centennial year of ODOT, we recognize all who have worked so hard to create and improve Oklahoma's transportation system. We also remember the 54 ODOT employees who, during those 100 years, have been killed in the line of duty – a figure surpassing that of any other Oklahoma state agency," ODOT Chief Engineer Gary Evans said.

A proclamation signed by Gov. Mary Fallin will be presented to the state Transportation Commission at its April 4 meeting, declaring Work Zone Awareness Week in Oklahoma.

Drivers are reminded to stay alert and heed warnings when approaching the familiar orange cones and barricades of marked construction zones by dedicating full attention to the roadway, avoiding the use of mobile devices or changing radio stations, leaving an adequate stopping distance between vehicles and allowing additional time to arrive at their destinations.

This year's Work Zone Awareness Week is sponsored in Oklahoma by ODOT, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, Federal Highway Administration, Oklahoma Highway Safety Office, Oklahoma Highway Patrol, The Association of Oklahoma General Contractors, City of Oklahoma City, City of Tulsa and AAA-Oklahoma.

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(Editors and News Directors: For more information call the ODOT Media & Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.)

INFORMATION RELEASE

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION  
200 N.E. 21ST ST. OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73105-3204 PHONE 405-521-6000



Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director of Operations Casey Shell launches the National Work Zone Awareness Week in Tulsa on Friday. This year marks the department's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Surrounding Shell, along with area law enforcement personnel, are ODOT work crew members, who were presented with certificates of recognition for their dedicated service. Also remembered at the gathering were the 54 ODOT workers who, during those 100 years, have lost their lives in the line of duty – more than any other state agency. Area law enforcement officers, construction crews and ODOT employees joined Shell in reminding drivers to be safe in Oklahoma's work zones.



Oklahoma Department of Transportation work crew members receive certificates of recognition during Friday's Work Zone Awareness press conference in Oklahoma City. This year marks 100 years of dedicated service by transportation department employees. Also remembered at the gathering were the 54 ODOT employees who, during those 100 years, have lost their lives in the line of duty – more than any other state agency. Handing out the certificates are ODOT Deputy Director/Chief Engineer Gary Evans, left, and Division 4 Engineer Paul Green.