

WORK ZONE SAFETY CHECK

By Jonathon Barnes

One of the first things that comes to mind when someone mentions safety is digging safety, which is not taken lightly in our industry. Many of the systems I visit a year have very safe practices for their dig operations. This is true testament to the education and application of our industry, however, one of the safety practices I see not applied is road safety. It seems to fall by the wayside of the adage of let's get it done. We need to change this.

Not finger pointing any operation but throughout the years in this industry it needs to be addressed! We all have rules and regulations for setting up on road for best safety practices. I would like to go over a few of those.

Taken straight from the NYS Department of Transportation Work zone Traffic Control manual –

- The work zone is the distance between the first advance warning sign and the point beyond the work area where traffic is no longer affected.

Advance warning area tells traffic what to expect ahead. Transition area moves traffic out of its normal path. The Activity area provides space for the work, traffic, and buffer space and/or protective vehicles between the two.

- Buffer areas separate traffic from workers and provide a recovery area for errant vehicles. No equipment, vehicles or material shall be placed in this area.
- Protective vehicle area provides a temporary barrier vehicle and roll-ahead distance for worker safety. If a vehicle is not being used, then the roll-ahead distance is not necessary. No equipment, vehicles or material shall be placed in the roll-ahead distance.
- Work area is set aside for workers, equipment and material storage.

Termination area lets traffic resume normal driving.

Buffer Spaces

The buffer space is a crucial safety feature of a work zone. It serves to separate traffic flow from the work area or potentially hazardous area and provides recovery space for an errant vehicle. In the past, buffer spaces (both longitudinal and lateral) were an optional feature in NYS work zone traffic control. However, in NYS a longitudinal buffer space is no longer optional in most cases. A few exceptions have been made depending on the type of work operation and the use of protective vehicles. If there is any question as to whether a buffer space is required for a specific operation, please contact listed in NYS DOT's website. Neither work activity nor the storage of equipment, vehicles, or material shall occur in this area. A lateral buffer space may also be used to separate passing traffic from the work area. Its use and width are based on conditions at the work site.

Guidance for Proper Signing

- Install work zone advance-warning signs pursuant to Typical Applications whenever the work results in a changed condition which may require a higher level of driver caution. For work which obstructs traffic, a 3-sign series is typical. The first sign is a general warning sign to get the motorist's attention. The second sign warns of the specific condition and the third sign advises the driver of any action to be taken.
- Location of advance warning signs should consider exiting and entering traffic. Advance posting distances indicated in the MUTCD and WZTCM are starting points and should be adjusted as appropriate for site specific conditions. Avoid starting a warning sign series upstream from a major exit or intersection, except when it is desirable to divert traffic off the route at that point or where the intersection is within 1000 feet of the work site.
- Warning signs must be located to provide adequate visibility distance to drivers; not blocked by foliage, roadway features, or other signs and traffic control devices; and not located where glare from light sources behind the sign may reduce visibility. Actual distance from a warning sign to the condition should be close to the stated distance on the sign, but accuracy should not be at the expense of sign visibility.
- Signs must be adequately spaced to provide time for the driver to read each one. Sign spacing varies with the type of highway and the prevailing speeds and is specified in the MUTCD and WZTCM. See Advance Warning Sign Spacing Table on the next page for details.
- In urban conditions, advance warning sign spacings may be adjusted in order to accommodate side streets and driveways

And from the ny.gov website (<https://tinyurl.com/2p8dc2ec>) Construction and maintenance crews across the state work alongside fast-moving traffic each day and moving over can literally mean the difference between their life and death. In March 2019 alone, several move over violations resulted in crashes, one with deadly consequences. On March 13, 2019, a DOT highway maintenance worker was struck and killed in a work zone along Route 17 in Tioga County. The highway maintenance worker was struck by a distracted tractor trailer driver who ignored work zone warnings and failed to move over. On March 26, 2019, four Thruway Authority highway maintenance workers were injured when a distracted tractor trailer driver entered a marked work zone and struck two Thruway vehicles.



Also in March, two New York State Troopers escaped serious injuries in separate crashes on the Thruway, which involved drivers who failed to move over.

These are only a few points for your reference! Let all of us bring our work zone safety to a top priority with our Operators, Boards, Community members, Police, and to the ROADWAYS!

To find these rules and layouts these two QR Codes serve as quick access to the Work Zone safety manual and the Components of a Work Zone Traffic Control Area, or you can visit the NYS DOT Website. The knowledge is there! The safety is there! Time to put it into action.

Simply open the camera on your phone and point it at the QR Code and it will drop a tab to open the page. Click the tab and you will be taken directly to the corresponding pages! Let's all set a record for minimal accidents from here on out! 💧💧



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