

For Immediate Release
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Shawano County officials advise drivers to pay attention, slow down this construction season

Shawano County Highway Commissioner Grant Bystol urges people to drive carefully in highway work zones throughout the 2024 construction and maintenance season.

“Our highway crews work very hard for our communities, often within feet of traffic,” Bystol said. “Just like you, they want to make it home at night to their families. Please focus on the road ahead and slow down – especially in work zones.”

According to data provided by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), over the past five years (2019-2023) there have been more than 10,600 crashes in Wisconsin work zones causing 64 deaths and more than 3,800 injuries.

In Wisconsin, work zones can vary in all shapes and sizes. They could include major highway construction and rehabilitation, maintenance, emergency response, utility work, municipal projects and more – any time in which there are flashing lights, signs, barrels or workers on the road.

This year’s National Work Zone Awareness Week takes place April 15-19. This year’s theme is “Work Zones are temporary. Actions behind the wheel can last forever.” Work Zone Awareness Week is sponsored by federal, state and local transportation officials to draw attention to the safety needs of road workers throughout the construction season.

Wednesday, April 17 is “Go Orange Day” in which people are asked to wear something orange in support of highway safety. Show your support on social media by posting your pictures and use the hashtag #OrangeForSafety, but please always refrain from using electronics while driving.

“We ask everyone on the road to eliminate distractions and be mindful of their speed,” Bystol said. “Even in areas with reduced speed limits, things can happen in an instant. Always expect the unexpected.”

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 Law, which requires drivers to shift lanes or slow down to provide a safety buffer for a law enforcement vehicle, 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.

In addition, emergency or work zone areas are protected by laws that aim to keep workers safe. Hand-held cell phone use is illegal and fines double in construction zones as well as areas surrounding emergency response vehicles with flashing lights.

Before traveling, drivers are encouraged to check 511 Wisconsin – [511wi.gov](https://www.511wi.gov) and follow @511WI on X/Twitter – or use the 511 Wisconsin app for access to road conditions, live traffic cameras and more.

Give your undivided attention to the road:

- Eliminate distractions. Eating, drinking, talking on the phone, or simply changing the radio station can divert your focus to the road ahead.
- 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. Move over, if possible, or slow down when you see flashing lights.
- Consider turning off the phone until you reach your destination.
- If you have to make a call, find a secure place to pull over and stop, such as a wayside or a gas station.

Visit the WisDOT website to learn more and test your knowledge by taking the work zone safety quiz: wisconsindot.gov/Pages/safety/education/workzone/default.aspx.

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