

News from NYS Department of Transportation

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## NYSDOT UNVEILS HIGHWAY WORK ZONE EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Truck Billboards and New Website to Raise Public Awareness of Construction Zones

ALBANY, NY -- (06/08/2005; 1100)(EIS) -- New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Chief Operating Officer Brian O. Rowback was joined today by officials from the State Department of Correctional Services (DOCS), State Police, State Thruway Authority, State Bridge Authority, Federal Highway Administration, Associated General Contractors of America, and the American Automobile Association (AAA), to unveil a new work zone education initiative featuring work zone safety messages appearing on trucks operated by CorCraft, the manufacturing division of DOCS. This is one of a series of efforts designed to educate the public on the importance of work zone safety.

"Knowing what to do when approaching a highway work zone can mean the difference between life and death for both motorists and the individuals who work to improve our highways and byways," Chief Operating Officer Rowback said. "These initiatives are provided to make the traveling public understand the importance of slowing down when and where they see orange. We're out there making our roads safer for you; We need you to help make it safer for us."

The principal initiative announced today is a joint effort between NYSDOT, DOCS and the Thruway Authority to place work zone safety and travel information messages on the 192-strong CorCraft truck fleet. CorCraft, the trade name of the DOCS Division of Correctional Industries, manufactures furniture and equipment for New York State government offices.

The program calls for 103 CorCraft trucks to feature messages prompting motorists to slow down in work zones and will include a graphic of either a men working sign or a "Slow Down, My Mommy/Daddy Works Here" sign. In addition, 89 other trucks will highlight the availability of [www.travelinfony.com](http://www.travelinfony.com), a new web site that offers travelers access to real-time traffic and road construction information.

"We all know the importance of work zone safety on our highways," said DOCS Commissioner Glenn S. Goord. "We are delighted to promote work zone safety through messages carried on our nearly 200 CorCraft vehicles, which log more than 1 million miles a year on New York's roadways. Reinforcing work zone safety is critical to increasing public awareness and driver safety across our state. I commend the Department of Transportation for this initiative designed to protect the men and women who work along our roadways."

NYSDOT also announced a new, interactive work zone safety web site available at [www.travelinfony.com](http://www.travelinfony.com) or [www.dot.state.ny.us](http://www.dot.state.ny.us). The state-of-the-art web site features a unique test drive simulator with which individuals can test their ability to properly navigate a work zone. The site also features an interesting work zone safety quiz, tips for safe driving in work zones, and a short video shot live during a road project to show motorists a work zone from the point of view of a highway worker.

"New York State's safety record is one of the best in the country," said Robert Arnold, administrator of the New York Division of the Federal Highway Administration. "The State Department of Transportation, the State Thruway Authority and the State Bridge Authority have done much to make their work zones safer over the years, but now we are asking the driving public to do their part in making them even safer."

New York's transportation agencies are continually working to improve safety and best practices within work zones. NYSDOT works to ensure that highway work, especially in urban areas, is conducted at off-peak hours when traffic is at a minimum. A number of safety measures are taken to protect both workers and motorists alike. These include modern flagging operations; use of concrete median barrier; bright orange cones and barrels to separate traffic from work space; highly reflective sheeting on orange work zone signs; rumble strips to alert motorists to road conditions; and reduced work zone speed limits with dedicated police enforcement.

"Raising driver awareness regarding proper precautions in highway work zones is vital," said Thruway Authority Deputy Executive Director John Brizzell. "The Thruway is rated one of the safest highways in the

nation. To continue this trend we encourage motorists to remain alert and aware of their surroundings as they travel along highways where construction is taking place."

New York State Bridge Authority Executive Director George C. Sinnott said, "All authorities and agencies entrusted with the state's transportation systems are committed to maintaining these important assets. The motoring public must realize that our most important assets in this effort are our workers on the roads in the work zones."

NYSDOT and its partners also work diligently to reduce incidents in work zones through the use of technologies such as electronic highway message signs, including some that have been deployed across the state to alert motorists of their speed. Most recently, NYSDOT and the State Thruway and Bridge Authorities posted [www.travelinfony.com](http://www.travelinfony.com) to advise travelers of the presence of work zones and help them prepare to encounter them as they travel state highways.

State law doubles the minimum fine for motorists who fail to obey posted work zone speed limits. New York's transportation agencies work closely with state and local law enforcement to encourage motorist compliance of work zone rules. State Police also patrol NYSDOT and State Thruway work zones in an initiative called Operation Hard Hat, in which troopers inconspicuously placed within work zones record speeds of vehicles and radio descriptions of violators to teammates in marked chase cars.

"The New York State Police commend the Department of Transportation, Department of Correctional Services, and the Thruway Authority for emphasizing the vital significance of work zone safety," said New York State Police Superintendent Wayne E. Bennett. "The collaboration of these agencies has provided an innovative method of educating our state's motorists and the public on this very important issue."

Even with strong enforcement efforts and innovative project design and management, motor vehicle crashes into work zones continue to threaten the safety of construction workers and motorists. A total of 467 traffic crashes were reported in NYSDOT capital construction work zones in 2004, with seven of them resulting in fatalities.

In the last 10 years, there were 485 intrusions into NYSDOT construction and maintenance work zones, 62 of them last year and 24 of them in just the first month of this construction season. Work zone intrusions occur when vehicles enter the closed portion of a marked work zone. Intrusions, while rare, pose significant threats to construction workers and motorists alike.

"On behalf of the tens of thousands of men and women working to improve New York State's roads and bridges, the Associated General Contractors applauds all efforts to educate the traveling public to the dangers of driving recklessly through construction work zones," said AJ Castelbuono, President & CEO, Associated General Contractors of New York State. "We need all drivers to remember that when they see orange, they need to slow down and pay attention. Cones bounce and barrels roll but men and women break, and one moment of carelessness can shatter dozens of lives."

Today's announcement comes on the heels of one of the worst work zone crashes in New York State history. On May 20, three highway workers were killed in a work zone on Interstate 81 in the Town of Chenango, Broome County, when a charter bus, reportedly speeding, struck a tractor trailer that had properly slowed, causing a chain reaction that led to the deaths. According to the Federal Highway Administration, 1,000 people were killed nationally in work zone crashes in 2003.

"New York's motorists must do their part on our state's highways this year by being alert, being prepared, and driving safely," said Roger Dames, traffic safety representative for the American Automobile Association (AAA) Hudson Valley Club. "When approaching a work zone, please be sure to follow posted speed limits, obey instructions from flaggers, and always expect the unexpected."

NYSDOT and its transportation partners remind motorists to observe the following ten safety tips critical for safe navigation through highway construction and maintenance work zones:

1. Expect the unexpected in any work zone on any highway. Speed limits may be reduced, traffic lanes may be closed or shifted, and people and vehicles could be present on or near the road.
2. Diamond-shaped orange warning signs are posted in advance of road work. Slow down, pay attention, and be alert!
3. Flagger ahead signs could also be posted in advance of a work zone. When encountered, stay alert and prepare to obey instructions from the flagger. In a work zone, flaggers have the same authority as a regulatory sign, so you may be cited for disobeying their directions.
4. Stay calm. Work zones exist to improve the safety and durability of roads for you and your community.
5. You may encounter flashing arrow panels or "lane closed ahead" signs. Safely merge as soon as possible. Do not try to cut off other motorists. You can help maintain traffic flow and posted speeds by moving to the appropriate lane as soon as you see lane closure warning signs.

6. Slow down immediately when directed by signage. A car traveling 60 m.p.h. travels 88 feet per second. Vehicles 1,500 feet from a work zone will reach the work zone in 17 seconds when traveling at that speed.

7. Leave at least two-seconds of braking distance between you and the car in front of you. The most common crash in work zones is the rear-end collision.

8. Maintain a safe distance between your vehicle and traffic barriers, trucks, construction equipment and workers. Pay attention to trucks on highways that have "Do Not Follow, Construction Vehicle" posted on the rear of their vehicles. These vehicles will likely enter a construction zone.

9. Be aware of mobile work zones, such as line painting, road patching, and mowing. Observe all posted work zone signs and messages until you see the one that states you've left the work zone.

10. Highway agencies work to inform motorists about the location and duration of major work zones. Often, detour routes will be suggested to help you avoid the work zone. Motorists are encouraged to plan ahead and try an alternate route.

-30-

Return to the [Current Index](#).

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