



COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
TRANSPORTATION CABINET
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Gov. Beshear, Transportation Cabinet Remind Motorists to “Drive Distraction Free in Work Zones” as Work Zone Incidents Spiked in 2023

Highway safety practices urged during National Work Zone Awareness Week April 15-19

FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 11, 2024) – As construction season’s orange cones and barrels spring up along Kentucky highways, state officials remind everyone to drive distraction free and slow down. Those safe driving practices will reduce the dangers highway crews face in work zones and could save lives.

In 2023, Kentucky recorded 1,251 crashes in highway work zones where 247 people were injured and 17 lost their lives – nearly triple the number of fatalities in the previous year.

“This week, we remind Kentuckians to be aware when driving through work zones on our roadways,” said Gov. Andy Beshear. “Help protect yourselves, your families and your neighbors – the men and women who serve on the front lines improving our infrastructure – by driving distraction free every time you’re behind the wheel, and reducing your speed when traveling through work zones.”

National Work Zone Awareness Week begins on Monday, April 15, and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) is joining state transportation agencies nationwide to promote safe driver and worker practices to save lives and prevent injuries. Kentucky’s annual Vested in Work Zone Safety Campaign reinforces the message that safe drivers plus safe workers equal safe work zones.

The following activities to promote safety are planned during the week.

- Monday, April 15 (10 a.m. EDT) - Kickoff media event in Lexington, Clarion Hotel Parking Lot
- Tuesday, April 16 - KYTC Worker Safety Training Day
- Wednesday, April 17- Vested in Work Zone Safety Day- Post a pic wearing high-visibility gear on social media using #VestedinWZSafety and #NWZAW

- Thursday, April 18 – Work Zone Safety Social Media Stories and Tips – Tag and share content from @KYTC X account and Facebook.com/kytc120

A work zone is anywhere a crew member is working, and can involve construction workers, maintenance workers, utility crews, mowing contractors, brush cutters and tree trimmers.

“Safe driving practices are a commitment to ensuring everyone returns home safely at the end of every day,” said Transportation Secretary Jim Gray. “Our choices behind the wheel are a matter of life and death, and the data proves it. Kentuckians are sure to encounter a work zone, with multiple active work zones across the state and more expected to appear during the warmer months. In the same way we ask and train our crews to be safe, we ask the public to watch out for each other and workers.”

Year after year, the majority of work zone crash victims are motorists. Of the 17 who died last year, 14 were either passengers or drivers. In addition, law enforcement crash reports indicate that distracted driving was a factor for nearly 42% of work zone crashes last year, while speed and speed-related issues like overcorrecting and failure to stay in lane were a factor in 25% of crashes.

“Practicing the basics of safe driving, like buckling up and obeying posted speed limits, is more than a smart move, it’s the law,” said Kentucky State Police Captain Paul Blanton. “With motorists being the primary victims of serious injuries and deaths, we all have a vested interest in driving with caution through work zones.”

KYTC has an ongoing effort to increase safety in work zones through a combination of training and equipment innovations. They include the use of temporary rumble strips, made of heavy rubber, which are portable and can be moved as a work zone advances. Crews often use a queue protection vehicle, also called a crash cushion, which is a large, truck-mounted shock absorber equipped with warning lights and message board. It is positioned on the shoulder of the highway, a half-mile before stopped traffic, and moves with the traffic queue.

“Whether our transportation crews are stationed behind barrier walls, repairing traffic signals or on the move patching potholes, it’s crucial to recognize that where they work is where we drive,” said Secretary Gray. “It’s the responsibility of Kentucky drivers to prioritize worker’s safety by remaining vigilant and cautious within these zones.”

Here are tips for driving safely in a work zone:

- **Pay attention.** Don’t text or talk on the phone. Keep both hands on the wheel.
- **Drive alert.** Watch for speed limit reductions, narrowing lanes, changing traffic patterns and – most importantly – workers.
- **Respect posted speed limits.**
- **Be patient.** Driving 45 mph instead of 55 mph through a 5-mile work zone will only add 1.2 minutes to your trip. Speeding and aggressive driving are major causes of work zone crashes.

- **Keep a safe distance.** Allow space on all sides of your vehicle and maintain a safe following distance. The most common type of work zone crash is a rear-end collision.
- **Respect flaggers and obey their guidance.** A flagger has the same authority as a regulatory sign, so a driver can be cited for disobeying the flagger's directions.
- **Follow instructions on construction signage.** Those signs are carefully selected to give drivers accurate information and important warnings.
- **Know before you go.** Check out go.ky.gov or use the free WAZE app for traffic and travel information. Select alternate routes when possible. If a work zone cannot be avoided, expect delays and allow for extra time.

To learn more about KYTC's Vested in Work Zone Safety Campaign and to see a list of scheduled events, visit KYTC. Work zone testimonials and tips will be shared all week on KYTC social media accounts.

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