

Behind the Vest - External

Highway work zones are dangerous places. Construction and maintenance workers put their lives on the line every day, often working just an arm-length away from traffic moving 50 to 60 miles an hour.

Signs are put up, traffic cones are placed, and flaggers direct traffic, but highway workers live with the knowledge that death and injury could be a heartbeat away.

Curtis Murphy, EO Senior, Overland Park Subarea

To be honest, sometimes it's scary but all of our guys know what they're doing so we try to look out for each another.

Curtis Haehn, EO Hugoton Subarea

If you're out on the road, you better be watching out because they're not, too many of them are not. And they will run through just as fast as they can go.

Ronald Pillar, EO, Columbus

They don't see you half the time out there. You can have signs up, I've had several close calls, and they don't see you.

Jim Antrim, Striping Supervisor, Norton

A mini-van hit our crash attenuator, shot across the median, across the westbound traffic, into the field out north of the interstate...

When we finally got up to the driver, he just said he wasn't paying attention. We had all our lights going, but he said he wasn't paying attention.

Dave Tipton, EO Senior, Gardner Subarea

Patching is probably about the worst. I've had them come around the shoulder on me and the guys blow the air horn and I've got to jump out of the way.

Darren Bailey, EO Specialist in Hutchinson

There's always vehicles going in and out and between us and come screeching up behind the striper, within four feet.

Luke Perry, ET Senior, Seneca

You got to have your head on a swivel all the time because you don't know what's going to happen.

Brad Reeh, EO Specialist, Colby

You've got a lot of stuff moving, you've got vehicles coming by you. If you're not on your toes, you can get hurt, seriously hurt.

Charles Stevens, Engineering Technician, Bonner Springs

I've had plenty of close calls. I had one, a guy actually hit me out on the work zone...

Robert Turner – Maintenance Supervisor, Lamar

I was called in by my area supervisor to assist highway patrol with traffic control – they were working a really bad accident at I-435 and 635...

so I set up my truck, had the flashing arrow on the attenuator flashing, had the ramp coned off and everything, and I was flagging traffic...

I noticed headlights coming at me and noticed that those set of headlights weren't getting over like traffic had been doing. So I continued to flag them over and I noticed they were getting closer and closer. At a certain point, I told myself this vehicle wasn't getting over, so I basically jumped out of the way, dove out of the way towards the truck and as I was in mid-flight I guess you could say, this vehicle came right through the cones and as my legs were stretched out, his passenger side front fender clipped my legs and kind of spun me around and then dropped me down on the ground.

I just ended up with bumps and bruises no broken bones or anything, a couple of scraps, I was really, really lucky.

Josh MacEwan, Master Trooper, Kansas Highway Patrol

During my time on Kansas highways, I have worked many crashes that could have been prevented, including some in Kansas work zones.

Orange means work zone.

When you encounter a work zone, watch for the cones, the barrels, and the signs and especially the highway workers out there doing their jobs

Be alert, minimize distractions such as cell phones or eating and always be aware of your surroundings.

Be patient, reduce speed if necessary.

Be courteous, it is important to think safety at all times because a tragedy can happen in a split second.

Kevin Palic, Construction Engineer in Seneca

I got the phone call that one of our guys had been hit...

When I got out there, the helicopter was out there, so then you get the realization that something serious is going on. So then you come out there and you walk around the corner and all you see are two white blankets so it kind of hits you just really what happened.

Shirley McDonald

My son, Scott McDonald, who I refer to as Scotty, was killed June 1, 2005, on highway 75 north of Topeka. He was working for KDOT and on that particular morning it's my understanding that he working with one other person and they were collecting trash and he happen to be the person outside of the truck collecting.

I just remember my husband coming forward and saying to me, it's Scotty, he's gone. And I just looked at him and thought what are you talking about, I mean the last time I'd seen him was just 12 hours before and he was a perfectly healthy, happy, young man.

I was so numb for so long, I mean it's been a little over three years now and there are still times I really cannot believe my son is dead. I cannot believe that he won't be walking through the door.

Pay attention to what you're doing and realize that your life and other people's lives depend on it. And that you can't bring people back, when they're dead, they're dead.

Brian Hoke – Highway Maintenance Supervisor, Overland Park Subarea

It's hard at times because you're trying to concentrate on the traffic and you're job and the surroundings on the job, so you're looking at the safety inside the work zone and also the safety outside the work zone for the public and the employees.

Slow down going through a work zone, because I have children at home and I have grandchildren and I want to go home every night to see them along with everyone else in the shop.

Darren Bailey, EO Specialist in Hutchinson

We're out there to help them make the roads safer for them, and if they'd just be a little more considerate and make it a little safer for us too.

Kevin Palic, Construction Engineer in Seneca

Just try to understand that 15 minutes isn't going to make or break a day, it's not worth a life to try to get there a little bit faster, so try to keep that in mind.

(Voice over during full screens of names)

I wish there was something really profound that we could tell people, but I just don't think people have an appreciation for the lives that are out there. Everyone wants good roads, they want to be able to travel through effortlessly as they go across the state. But they just need to realize these workers are important there are just too many lives on the line out there.