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Close calls in highway work zones occur all too often

Highway construction projects are continuing across the state with modified work practices. And as always, work zone safety is a top priority for the Kansas Department of Transportation, Kansas Turnpike Authority and partner organizations. Unfortunately, there are oftentimes close calls in work zones.

KDOT Equipment Operator Specialist Kent Portenier, from the Phillipsburg office, realized a vehicle traveling through a work zone did not see him.

“I took off towards the ditch just as the driver hit the corner of the stopped pickup,” Portenier said. “The driver also swerved into the ditch and fortunately missed hitting me as I was running to safety.”

KTA Structures Worker Caleb Provo, from the Wichita office, was in a dump truck during a striping operation when he saw a semi traveling in the wrong lane.

“There was no way the driver could stop in time, and he tried to – unsuccessfully - squeeze between me and the barrier wall to avoid a collision,” Provo said. “Ultimately, the semi driver ended up crashing into the back end of my attenuator.”

Portenier, Provo and others are sharing their stories this week as part of a blog series to help illustrate the importance of work zone safety. Read all the blogs here - www.kansastransportation.blogspot.com.

“Close calls are all too common for highway workers, law enforcement and emergency responders who are serving the public,” said KDOT State Transportation Engineer Burt

Morey. “It’s imperative that all drivers make paying attention and focusing on the road their main priorities every time they get in a vehicle.”

National Work Zone Awareness Week, which is April 20-24, raises awareness of the dangers highway workers and motorists face in work zones. Last year in Kansas, 1,420 work zone crashes occurred in which 437 people were injured and seven people were killed. A few locations around the state will be lit in orange to highway work zone safety, such as the Amelia Earhart Memorial bridge in Atchison.

For more information about work zone safety in Kansas, go to KDOT’s website, www.ksdot.org, and click on the work zone safety slide.

Photo attached: File photo of the Amelia Earhart Memorial bridge lit in orange during a past National Work Zone Awareness Week safety campaign.

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