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## Start of construction season brings reminders

Drivers advised to slow down, stash phones

BY PATTI BRANDT BURGESS pburgess@record-eagle.com Apr 9, 2019



TRAVERSE CITY — Rachel Snell of Bay City says keeping road workers safe starts with teaching young kids about construction zones on Michigan’s roads and highways.

Snell’s husband David, who was 57, was killed in June while working on I-75 near Detroit, becoming one of 18 people that were killed in a construction zone last year.

Four of the 18 were road workers.

“My husband was taken by a drunken driver who entered a work zone,” Snell said.

Snell was one of several people who spoke to a full house Monday at Team Elmer’s for the statewide kickoff of National Work Zone Awareness week. This year’s theme is “Drive like you work here.”

John Richard, communications representative for the Michigan Department of Transportation, said during construction season workers gear up for safety and hope that everyone else is following the rules.

“Driving is the most dangerous thing we do and we do it almost every day,” Richard said. “Live traffic is a nasty opponent that doesn’t care about the rules.”

Most of those who are killed in work zones are not road workers, but are drivers and passengers of vehicles going through the zones. Of the 25 fatalities in 2017, just one was a road worker. Other recent deaths include a police officer, a refuse collector and a teacher helping students at a crosswalk.

Despite the emphasis on safety, work zone fatalities have steadily increased over the last decade. Fatalities in the last two years rose sharply from the low of 8 fatalities in 2013.

Rachelle VanDeventer, vice president of industry relations for the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association, said a recent poll of road construction workers showed that 74 percent of them say that work zones pose a greater risk now than they did a decade ago.

“It’s because of the greater number of distractions and people just aren’t paying attention,” VanDeventer said. “People are distracted and they’re just not slowing down.”

There’s a lot of road work that needs to be done in Michigan, she said, so work zones aren’t going away any time soon, she said.

Michigan’s numbers mirror what is going on nationally, where there were 799 work zone fatalities in 2017, according to the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse. Numbers are up from the 586 people killed in road work zones in 2010.

Lt. Travis House, public information officer for the Michigan State Police, said troopers patrol construction zones looking for workers who are angry, distracted or impaired.

Slow down to 45 mph — the speed limit in work zones — and don’t tailgate, as rear end collisions are the most common cause of traffic crashes in work zones, House said.

Also, he said, wait until you’re not driving to answer that text.

“Workers lives are in peril because we can’t wait and put our phones down,” House said, and drivers need to have a little patience and courtesy.

“Today’s construction zone results in a smoother drive to work tomorrow,” House said.

## Fatalities

Year	Total fatalities	Road worker fatalities
2018	18	4*
2017	25	1
2016	18	2
2015	9	2
2014	11	3

2013	8	1
2012	14	5
2011	9	1
2010	12	6
2009	11	3
2008	11	0

Source: National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse

\*2018 statistics are preliminary.

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