

Workers ahead: hints for surviving road construction season

Summertime and the driving's not so easy: heed the signs, be patient and keep it in perspective

Well, I've come to the understanding that while Winnipeg has a wealth of unique festivals, events and character, there is one thing it has in common with every other major city in Canada.

It has two seasons. Winter and road construction.

I must admit, when the radio traffic report first started mentioning "barricades" going up downtown and throughout the city, I assumed that this was in preparation for yet another one of the many festivals I've come to expect in the summer. Yes, I was born yesterday.

I grew up in a hurry about 15 minutes later when I ground to a dead stop on Pembina and realized that this was anything but a festival.

Road construction is a good thing. It really is. But it's frustrating and hazardous to everyone participating in it, work crews and drivers alike. And it's a double-edged sword, as both



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road construction and motor vehicle travel boom in the summer.

Construction no party

Motorists get particularly agitated because it seems to be everywhere. No matter where you're headed, odds are pretty good that you'll run into those familiar orange pylons or barricades.

Well, be thankful that the pylons are all you run into. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 477 drivers or passengers died in 1998 in the United States due to work zone accidents. Include the number of workers involved in the accidents, and the number climbs to 772.

Now, I'm sure you're wondering, "how can accidents happen when everyone has to go so darn slow in construction zones???"

Well, any time you ask drivers to slow down, you're asking them to increase their travel time. That makes many people angry, and some people very angry. And as you also know, very angry people on the road make poor decisions, drive aggressively, and ultimately cause crashes.

These people ignore the signs, or cut out of the construction zone in a blaze of speed and squealing tires in an attempt to make up time. Worse still, some drivers take the same risk in the construction zone, and that's when both the other traffic and the road crews are most at risk.

So, obviously, drivers have a role to play in keeping everyone inside and outside the vehicle safe.

But, what role can construction crews play? The most frequent

complaint voiced by motorists: they come upon signs telling them to slow down for road work up ahead, but they never see any workers as they do the right thing and crawl through the zone.

This "cry wolf" syndrome can have disastrous consequences down the road where the work really is underway.

Visibility can also be a problem. Europe is using lime green clothing to identify road workers, and they're complete outfits, not just vests. Sometimes it appears that the workers in the orange vests "blend in" with all the other orange paraphernalia in a work zone, making them harder to spot... and avoid hitting.

Unique hazards for trucks

Truckers have a unique problem with road-work. They are often faced with lanes in construction zones that are simply too narrow for their rigs to negotiate safely, or forced to make corners they can't get around.

The Teamsters union has indicated that large trucks were involved in

12 per cent of all highway deaths in the US in 1996, but were involved in 25 per cent of all work zone fatalities that same year.

Here are some tips for the zone:

- Heed the signs, but watch for unexpected workers or equipment.
- Obey the posted speed limit.
- Closed lanes mean a "bottleneck." Move over early—don't wait until the last second and try to force your way into the open lane (trying this also makes you one of the most hated humans on the planet. You don't want that reputation, do you?)
- Be patient.

That's all for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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