

Caution, workers ahead: summer is the season for road construction

Motorists must keep their heads and remember that everyone is in a compromised position in a construction zone

Pop Quiz: How do you know it's summer in Manitoba? Here's a couple of hints: the aroma of fresh-cut grass is overpowered by the smell of bug spray and mosquito coils, and orange barricades, hard hats, and heavy equipment are popping up faster than the dandelions on your neighbour's lawn.

Oh yes, it must be summer if it's taking you an hour longer than it did last month to get from here to there.

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 road construction and motor vehicle travel boom in the summer.

Whether you're headed to the lake or simply trying to get to work in the morning, odds are pretty good you'll be idling (no pun intended) with long lines of other motorists, gritting your teeth and silently cursing everybody wearing steel



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toed boots. Yes, it's irritating. But if you don't keep your head and your temper, it's also dangerous. Construction zone accidents occur, and occur more often than you think.

OK, so now you're thinking "Oh sure, Mr. Road Safety Guy, how can accidents occur when I, like everyone else, am travelling so slowly that a kid on a scooter could blow my doors off?"

Construction slows, angers drivers

Well, any time you ask drivers to slow down, you're asking them to increase their travel time. Increasing the time it normally takes to get somewhere, be it to work or to play, makes many people angry, and a few

people downright nasty. 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 peel out of the end of the construction zone in a blaze of speed and bad attitude 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 Mr. or Ms. Construction Person play? The most frequent complaint voiced by motorists: they come upon signs telling them to slow down or merge for road work up ahead, but they never see any workers as they do the right thing and crawl through the zone. I personally experienced this three times on the way to work last week alone, and let me tell you if I wasn't a

trained road safety professional, adept in anger management, I could have quite easily lost my cool. Really. (Truth: my wife was driving in all three instances, so I was free to rant like a madman).

This "now you see us, now you don't" approach to construction zone signage can have disastrous consequences down the road where the work really is underway. Motorists, of course, must keep their heads and remember that everyone is in a compromised position in a construction zone: space is limited, visibility is restricted, there are often people working within a few feet of your vehicle, and the delay could last a few minutes or forever plus an hour. Construction crews have a responsibility to ensure that signage is clearly visible and accurate at all times.

#1 safety tip: be patient

Here's my theory: I believe there is a law of nature that states the less time you have to reach your destination, the longer the delay. It's Mother Nature's

way of saying we should have stuck to the horse and buggy. So, if I'm right and construction delays are Murphy's law in action, here are some tips to stay safe during the inevitable:

- Heed the signs, but watch for unexpected workers or equipment.
- Obey the posted speed limit at all times.
- 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 (this is a truly evil move and everyone will hate you for it).
- Most importantly, be patient. That's it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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