**For Immediate Release**

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**Rock County Highway Commissioner advises drivers to pay attention, slow down this construction season**

Rock County Highway Commissioner Duane Jorgenson urges people to drive carefully in highway work zones throughout the 2023 construction and maintenance season.

“Our highway crews work very hard for our communities, often within feet of traffic,” Jorgenson said. “Just like you, they want to make it home at night to their families. Please pay attention and slow down – especially in work zones.”

According to data provided by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), over the past five years there have been more than 11,500 crashes in Wisconsin work zones causing 63 deaths and more than 4,300 injuries.

In Wisconsin, work zones include major highway construction and rehabilitation, maintenance, emergency response, utility work, municipal projects and more – any time in which there are flashing lights, signs, barrels or workers on the road.

This year’s National Work Zone Awareness Week takes place April 17-21. This year’s theme is “You play a role in work zone safety. Work with us.” Work Zone Awareness Week is sponsored by federal, state and local transportation officials to draw attention to the safety needs of road workers during construction season.

Wednesday, April 19, is “Go Orange Day,” in which people are asked to wear something orange in support of highway safety. Everyone is encouraged to submit photos of themselves, their family, and their friends wearing orange to our office at highway@co.rock.wi.us and we will post them on our Work Zone Safety webpage. Show your support on social media by posting your pictures and use the hashtag #OrangeForSafety, but please always refrain from using electronics while driving.

“We ask everyone on the road to eliminate distractions and be mindful of their speed,”

Jorgenson said. “Even in areas with reduced speed limits, things can happen in an instant. Always expect the unexpected.”

While typical construction work zones are prevalent throughout the county and state, there are also significant numbers of maintenance operations that may be short-term or moving operations. Drivers are reminded of the state’s Move Over Law, which requires drivers to shift lanes or slow down to provide a safety buffer for a law enforcement vehicle, ambulance, fire truck, tow truck, utility vehicle, or highway maintenance vehicle that is stopped on the side of a road with its warning lights flashing.

In addition, emergency or work zone areas are protected by laws that aim to keep workers safe. Hand-held cell phone use is illegal and fines double in construction zones as well as areas surrounding emergency response vehicles with flashing lights.

Before traveling, drivers are encouraged to check 511 Wisconsin – [511wi.gov](http://www.511wi.gov) and @511WI on Twitter – or use the 511 Wisconsin smartphone app for updates on road conditions and traffic.

**Give your undivided attention to the road:**

* Eliminate distractions. Eating, drinking, talking on the phone, or simply changing the radio station can divert your focus to the road ahead.
* Expect the unexpected. Speed limits may be reduced, traffic lanes may be changed, and people and vehicles may be working on or near the road.
* Slow down. A car traveling 60 mph travels 88 feet per second, and the faster you go the longer it takes to stop.
* Give yourself room. Rear-end collisions are the most common work zone crashes, so don’t tailgate.
* Allow about three seconds of braking distance. Look for signs. Orange, diamond-shaped signs usually give you ample warning of lane closings, construction areas, and flaggers and other workers ahead.
* Be patient. If you don’t see workers, that doesn’t mean they’re not there. Observe the signs until you see one that says you’ve left the work zone.
* Plan ahead. Leave early or map out an alternate route. Find the latest road conditions and work zone news at 511 Wisconsin.
* Follow the law. Move over, if possible, or slow down when you see flashing lights.
* Consider turning off the phone until you reach your destination.
* If you have to make a call, find a secure place to pull over and stop, such as a wayside or a gas station.

Visit the WisDOT website to learn more and test your knowledge by taking the work zone safety quiz: [wisconsindot.gov/Pages/safety/education/workzone/default.aspx](http://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/safety/education/workzone/default.aspx).

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