



089: Traffic Control

Why this is important to you

Several hundred people die each year in traffic-related deaths in construction zones. The trend is rising because of changing demographics, increasing driver distractions (such as cell phones), and increasing work in traffic areas.

Both above grade and subsurface work on and around roadways will become more common with the replacement of crumbling infrastructure and the need for increased capacity, or with new innovations such as high-tech traffic control systems. You are likely to work on one of these projects, if you have not already done so.

Governments have responded to the increased dangers with “Give ‘em a brake” signs, construction zone fine multipliers, and severe penalties for violating certain motorist rules in construction zones. This is a problem that gets attention. Unfortunately, none of the corrective actions have eliminated the dangers.

What you need to do

Understand the general goal of traffic control plans—to route traffic through work zones as closely as possible to normal conditions using geometry and traffic control devices while minimizing danger to the working crews.

Understand the traffic control plan for your particular part of the project. Your foreman will communicate this plan to you, so ask questions as needed.

If you think you see a weakness in the plan, identify it to your foreman and ask for clarification or resolution. Not all plans are perfect. An example of a weakness is not allowing for sufficient room in the right place for the boom truck you need.

Understand the restrictions the traffic control plan places on you—where you can walk, what kinds of gestures you can make, where you can place tools, and so on.

Wear the proper PPE for the conditions. In some cases, this would mean wearing an orange vest or similar item that makes you stand out against the background.

When entering or exiting a pit or manhole—but especially when exiting—look first for vehicles that have run the barricades or are driving on the shoulder or other area where traffic is not supposed to be. This happens often enough that it is a concern.

On a large or long-lasting project, you’ll typically have traffic control attendants. It is very unlikely an electrician will be directing traffic. However, things happen—people get injured, don’t show up, etc., or a particular operation may require extra people to control traffic for a few minutes. You may be asked to help control traffic. In such a case, keep in mind that your goal is to communicate with motorists and with the other traffic controllers if there are any. Make eye contact and use clear hand signals. Allow time for people to respond.

If you are a small crew

On a small or short-lived project, you probably won’t have a traffic control attendant. Lineman work under such conditions all the time. In such cases, you must use traffic control devices to alert motorists to drive around your vehicle or work area. These devices would be unattended while you and others do the work.

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Read your company’s traffic control policy so you can answer any questions.

What this Safety Talk covers:

The importance of traffic control and what workers should know about it.

Discussion notes :

