

Drivers, keep mind on road in work zone

Keith Clines

With road construction season in high gear, drivers across the state can expect to navigate through more construction zones with vulnerable workers in or near the road.

With that in mind, the Alabama Department of Transportation is holding a "NO Distractions? Just Drive" promotion as part of this week's National Work Zone Awareness Week.

Gov. Bob Riley, DOT Director Joe McInnes and the Alabama Struck-By Alliance are urging drivers to slow down, pay attention, limit distractions and be aware of workers this week.

Riley issued a proclamation marking Monday through Friday as the 11th annual National Work Zone Awareness week.

The primary reasons for work zone-related crashes include alcohol, speeding and inattention, a DOT news release said.

"Most work zone crashes can be avoided," McInnes said. "The increase in crashes in Alabama and across the nation makes clear the dangers of inattention and distraction while driving through construction projects."

A study by the University of Alabama found that 17 people died and more than 722 people were injured in 2,320 crashes in highway work zones in the state in 2008.

The DOT said there is a work zone fatality every 10 hours nationally and one every 10 days in Alabama. Four of five people killed in work zones are drivers or passengers, the DOT said.

The DOT's campaign will include billboards across the state with the message that distracted drivers are a danger on the road, and that the lives of transportation employees and construction workers depend on motorists being alert and attentive behind the wheel.

"We want people to understand the dangers of driving through work zones while distracted, whether they are texting, talking on a cell phone or adjusting a music player," said Charlotte Kopf, chairwoman of the Alabama Struck-By Alliance Committee.

I-565 work zone

Just in time for National Work Zone Awareness Week, the DOT plans to have a work zone on Interstate 565 near Memorial Parkway for most of this week.

The DOT plans to repair bridge joints on westbound I-565 that will require the closing of some lanes from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

The inside lane at the Parkway exit will be closed for 1,000 feet Monday, and the two inside lanes at the same location will be closed Tuesday.

The two outside lanes in the same location will be closed Wednesday, and the outside lane will be closed Thursday.

Motorists are advised to use alternative routes, give themselves more time to reach their destination, observe work zone speed limits and use caution during the work.

Panoply street closings

Motorists heading downtown this week may face additional twists and turns to get where they're going because of street closings associated with next weekend's 29th annual Panoply Arts Festival.

Police will begin closing streets Monday morning for the festival held in Big Spring International Park. The streets will remain closed until the following Monday.

Details and the schedule for the street closings will be in Monday's Times.

City street repaving

The city's repaving plans this week involve only Vista Drive from Valley Lane to the cul-de-sac. Streets may be closed at various times for the work.

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