

From the archives of the



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String of work zone collisions highlights dangers highway workers face

By Barbara LaBoe

Our roadside maintenance workers face risks every day, but we've had a particularly troubling couple of weeks – so we're again asking all travelers to help us keep everyone on the roadway safe.

A recent string of crashes and injuries started a few hours before Halloween and now numbers four crashes and several injuries. The numbers are especially poignant this week during National Traffic Incident Response Awareness Week, designed to raise awareness about the dangers roadway responders face and the need to keep them safe.



Left: An accordion-like attenuator on the back of our TMA normally looks like this, as it's designed to absorb the impact from a crash and protect crews up ahead. Right: A crash along I-5 on Oct. 30 smashed this attenuator flat.

The string of recent frightening incidents started just before Halloween on the night of Wednesday, Oct. 30, when a vehicle struck one of our parked Truck Mounted Attenuator (TMA) vehicles that was protecting crews along I-5 in Lacey as they were clearing a blocked drain. The large, accordion-like attenuator was smashed flat by the impact and our worker driving the TMA was taken to the hospital with neck pain and was off work afterwards to recover.

A few hours later at 2 a.m. on Halloween morning, a semi truck clipped the bumper of a TMA in a work zone on SR 512 near the Washington State Fairgrounds in Puyallup, giving the TMA

driver whiplash. The next morning, Friday, Nov. 1, a driver crashed their vehicle into one of our dump trucks that was shielding a sweeper crew near the I-5/SR 512 interchange in Tacoma. After bouncing off our truck, the driver's vehicle was still going fast enough to move two large, heavy concrete barriers along the roadway. In this case our workers weren't hurt, but they were still shaken up and definitely put at risk.

The next week, on Thursday, Nov. 7, a pickup driven by a man under investigation for impaired driving, struck two of our workers while they were trimming trees alongside SR 104 near Port Gamble. The impact sent both workers to the hospital with injuries including a laceration that required staples and a fracture.



Left: A semi-truck clipping a TMA along SR 512 damaged the attenuator and sent the TMA driver to the hospital.

Right: A car struck one of our dump trucks hard enough to move two large Jersey barriers near the I-5/SR 512 interchange after bouncing off our truck.

Thankfully, none of these events caused life-threatening injuries, but all were certainly serious and concerning to the workers' families and coworkers. Imagine how you'd feel getting a call that a loved one had suffered these types of injuries or just barely escaped harm while at work. The difference between hospitalization or even death is often a matter of just inches or split-second reactions. Everyone working along the roadway – whether one of our crews, a contractor or first responder – is there to help keep travelers safe and keep traffic moving. And they all deserve to return home at the end of their shift.

That's why we need everyone's help to keep workers and travelers safe on our roadways. Please follow the state's Move Over or Slow Down law, which applies to several types of responders on the side of roadways including highway workers with flashing lights. Move over a lane as you approach crews on the roadside, and if you can't move over, slow down to 10 miles below the posted speed limit. While the bulk of construction has wrapped up for fall, we still have crews out on the road responding to maintenance needs and we'll also soon have snow and ice crews out in full force. Please do your part by paying attention whenever you're near a work zone or roadside crews.