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## **National Work Zone Awareness Week**

### **Traffic Crashes Decrease Slightly in Colorado's Work Zones**

Traffic crashes in Colorado construction zones decreased slightly in 2000, compared to 1999, reports the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). In 2000, there were 1,301 traffic crashes in state work zones compared to 1,324 in 1999. In 2000, 10 people died in work zone traffic crashes compared to 15 in 1999.

Governor Bill Owens proclaimed April 8-12 as Colorado Work Zone Safety Week. Despite the slight decrease recently, work zone traffic crashes have doubled in Colorado since 1990. This week has also been proclaimed National Work Zone Awareness Week. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, each year accidents in highway work zones result in more than 800 deaths and 40,000 injuries nationwide.

"Following posted speed limits and advisory signs can help drivers safely navigate through changing traffic patterns associated with highway construction and maintenance work zones, said CDOT executive director Tom Norton. "The safety of highway workers and drivers depend on patience and caution in work zones."

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Renee Reed, owner of Triple R Traffic Control in Agate, knows firsthand the devastation and loss caused by a work zone traffic crash. On July 27, 1999, Reed's father, Ed Thomas, lost his life on State Highway 14 at Pawnee Pass. Thomas, a 20-year veteran of the traffic control and construction industry in Colorado, was managing traffic operations in a work zone when a truck driver lost control of his vehicle.

Reed continues to work in traffic control and reminds drivers to pay attention in work zones and remember that highway workers are extremely vulnerable. "We all need to work together: CDOT, the prime contractor, traffic control and the motorist to keep everyone safe in work zones," said Reed."

Activities for work zone awareness week are being conducted in partnership with the Colorado Contractors Association. The Colorado Contractors Association and their member companies make safety for motorists driving through construction sites a top priority.

In 2001, for the third year, CDOT, the Colorado State Patrol (CSP) and local law enforcement agencies with major construction projects in their jurisdictions participated in the *Chill* campaign, a public awareness and enforcement effort targeting aggressive drivers in work zones. The campaign included grants to the CSP, La Plata County Sheriff's Office and the Aurora, Colorado Springs, Denver and Pueblo Police Departments for enforcement in highway work zones.

For those drivers who did not heed the message to *Chill* last year, troopers and officers wrote 5,484 tickets during the 122-day summer campaign. Speeding, improper lane use and ignoring traffic control devices were the top three violations. Speeding was clearly the biggest problem with nearly 40 percent of the tickets issued to drivers going at least 10 miles over the posted speed limit.

Statistics for Colorado work zones for 2000, the latest year available, show the most common types of crashes were rear-end, hitting a fixed object and sideswiping a vehicle traveling in the same direction.

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The summer *Chill* program will continue in 2002 with both enforcement and reminders to drivers to slow down and *chill* as temperatures and frustration rise.

“Drivers should take two seconds to slow down and remember that your vehicle can be a weapon, especially in a work zone,” said Col. Lonnie Westphal, Chief of the CSP. “Troopers and officers will make aggressive drivers the targets of our enforcement efforts.”

Chief Westphal offered these tips to help drivers deal with congestion and traffic delays:

- Take two seconds to buckle up children and fasten your seat belt.
- Maintain an interval of two seconds between you and the vehicle in front of you.
- Take two seconds to remember that aggressive driving can have tragic consequences.
- When confronted by an aggressive driver, ignore them and get out of their way.
- Avoid eye contact.
- Report aggressive drivers by dialing STAR CSP (\*277). It's free call from a cellular phone directly to the CSP.

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