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Ellice Avenue - Bituminex Paving

MHCA/Colin Corneau photo

CONSTRUCTION FLAGGERS KEEP US SAFE – SLOW DOWN, OBEY THE SIGNS

BY JACKIE JONES

Road construction slows the commute for everyone: motorists, bus riders, cyclists and pedestrians. That can be frustrating.

But if frustration gives way to impatience, it can be dangerous or deadly – particularly for the workers trying to get the job done.

Joe Dooley has been a heavy equipment operator for the province for over 19 years. Four years ago, life changed for him.

“It was a clear spring day, and I was following two graders that were doing road shoulder clean-up. I was driving behind them with a self-propelled sweep off broom truck doing about 10 km/hour,” he recounts. “Even though we had followed all of our safety procedures, this didn’t stop a motorist from rear-ending me.”

“When I was hit, my head smashed the back window, and my truck was thrown into the ditch,” he said. “I was lucky to walk away with a concussion, broken ribs and bones.”

Dooley was off work for five months.

Now, with fall here, the need for caution when passing through road construction sites is as important as ever as the heavy construction industry is diligently working to finish projects before snow flies.

The MHCA WORKSAFELY team would like to remind all motorists to reduce their speed and drive with extra caution, as contractors wrap up construction projects.

The MHCA led the initiation in 2004 of an education campaign geared to increase awareness among motorists and the general public, and encourage them to pass construction sites in a respectful and safe manner. The intent is to keep everyone safe, including construction, utility and emergency services personnel,

equipment operators and all who work on, or adjacent to, our roadways.

The annual campaign has had an impact, leading to increased awareness among drivers of the need to protect the safety and health of Manitoba workers, explains Chris Lorenc, MHCA president and chairman of the SAFE Roads committee.

“Our key messaging usually begins in the spring and reminds the public that those working on and around our roadways deserve a safe and healthy workplace, as all workers do,” Lorenc says. “However, this message needs to be reiterated throughout the year.”

That became clear several weeks ago. A flagger on a local road construction site was going about his work duties, directing traffic, when he was struck by a vehicle. He was seriously injured.

Ray Bissonnette, safety manager of Nelson River Construction, stresses that the public must recognize that contractors setting up for construction are following provincial regulations for traffic control.

“We are out there working to improve Manitoba’s roadways for the public,” Bissonnette said. “Improving our road infrastructure takes hard work and time – please understand that they (construction crews) want to keep you safe. Please respect that you are in their workplace, so be patient and slow down and pay attention to keep them safe.”

For Dooley, who is also the trades component director for the MGEU, the SAFE Roads message “Slow Down. We Work Where You Drive” hits home.

“My message to the public is to slow down when approaching workers on our roadways during all seasons, including winter,” Dooley

stresses.

“This is also important to remember as we approach winter road-maintenance season. When you know there is a snow storm but you have to travel, leave a bit early. Do not pass snow removal operations.”

Stories like these serve as important reminders of why the MHCA puts a high priority on promoting the awareness of work zones and the need to be respectful of workers on our roadways.

“The MHCA is proud to be one of the founding organizations of the SAFE Roads campaign,” Lorenc said. “It was and remains our goal to highlight the importance of using extra caution around work zones. These men and women risk their lives each day to ensure roadways remain safe for all users.”

Work zones include areas where road construction, maintenance or utility activities take place. By following the tips below, all road users can stay safe and help protect crews at work:

Plan ahead – before setting out on the road, research your route to avoid work zones where possible and use available detours

Stay focused – keep your eyes on the road and avoid distractions such as cellphones and eating

Slow down and keep your distance – lane closures, reduced speeds and traffic-pattern shifts are common in work zones. Be alert and expect the unexpected

Obeys all signs – be aware of signage throughout work zones as they provide important information that warns drivers of approaching road conditions and disruptions

Protect workers – slow down as you approach workers, give them room and prepare to stop.

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