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Contact: Doug Hecox
Tel: 202-366-0660

U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood Urges Nation to Drive Carefully During Highway Construction Season

Latest Data Show Slight Increase in Work Zone Fatalities

WASHINGTON – As National Work Zone Awareness Week kicks off, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood called on drivers to protect America’s road workers by driving carefully in work zones. In 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, 587 people died in highway work-zone fatalities – an increase of 11 fatalities compared to 2010.

“As highway construction shifts into high gear, we’re asking all Americans to take roadway safety seriously and protect themselves and their passengers by paying attention and slowing down when driving through work zones,” said Secretary LaHood. “In April and year round, the men and women working to improve our nation’s highways and bridges deserve to do their work safely.”

National Work Zone Awareness Week is held each April at the traditional start of construction season, when the number of workers on roads and highways increases. Though highway workers are often among the victims of such crashes, it’s important for drivers to understand that four out of five victims in work zone crashes are actually drivers and their passengers. In a typical five-day work week, an average of seven motorists and one worker are killed. Generally, crashes occur when drivers speed through a work zone or do not pay attention to the changing road conditions and run into other vehicles, highway equipment, or safety barriers or drive off the road completely.

Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez kicked off National Work Zone Awareness Week today at the New Hampshire Avenue Streetscape Improvement project in Washington, D.C., where workers face some of the nation’s worst traffic on a daily basis. Similar observances are taking place nationwide. Since 2005, FHWA awarded nearly \$32 million in grants to promote work zone safety training and the National Work Zone Safety Clearinghouse.

“Workers put themselves in harm’s way to help the rest of us by building and maintaining the roads and bridges that get us where we need to go as safely as possible,” said Administrator Mendez. “When it comes to keeping highway workers and drivers safe, we’re all in this together.”

During the ceremony, the Administrator honored Alice Ward, a highway worker from Royersford, Pa., who nearly died last year when she was struck in a work zone by a driver, and Laurie Moser, the widow of a highway worker killed in a work zone near Frederick, Md., in 2007.

The Federal Highway Administration works with state departments of transportation, local officials and industry groups to promote improvements in work zone planning and design, increased worker training, strengthened law enforcement near work zones, and heightened awareness among drivers.

For more information on National Work Zone Awareness Week, visit http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/wz/outreach/wz_awareness.htm.

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