



Ashley Repka, a crew member at Formecology, a landscape company based in Evansville, Wis., wears an orange vest while placing safety cones on the roadway around parked vehicles and other equipment, an important step to reduce the risk of an injury or fatality.

# Roadside Safety

## Staying safe while landscaping near traffic

by Barbara Mulhern

### OSHA emphasis

Osscar Ruiz, a native of Mexico, was doing landscaping work on the shoulder of the busy Santan Freeway in Maricopa County, Ariz., when he was struck by a vehicle and killed. The driver of the vehicle, who had just worked a 10-hour night shift and had three hours of sleep the previous night, struck a truck pulling a trailer, then veered off onto the shoulder of the road where Ruiz was working. Although Ruiz was wearing an orange shirt at the time, the driver told police he didn't know he had hit him. Safety cones and barricades marking the work zone were in place.

This incident is just one example of the many hazards landscape contractors face when working near busy roadways. Even when a job site is away from a major highway, it's important to take precautions to reduce the risk that a crew member will be hit.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, roadway work zone crews sustain nearly 27,000 first aid injuries and 26,000 lost-time injuries per year at an annual cost of \$2.4 billion. Each year in the United States, more than 1,000 workers are killed in roadway work zone incidents—an average of three workers per day.

While many of these injuries and fatalities are the "fault" of the oncoming driver, landscape crew members are at high risk of injury or death, particularly when working on foot.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is paying increasing attention to safety in and around roadway work zones. OSHA, whose mission is to protect employees from serious injury and death, believes that it's critical that landscape contractors and other employers take proactive steps to reduce the risk of motor vehicle crashes in these areas.

Some OSHA areas and regions have specifically targeted roadway work zones for enforcement efforts. One of the first was the Jackson, Miss., area, which instructed its OSHA inspectors to be on the lookout for crew members working in roadway work zones without the proper safeguards.

Reminder: If one of your crew members is injured or killed and OSHA investigates, it's you, the employer, who can be cited and fined. That's among the reasons why it's so important to have written safety rules that are consistently enforced and to require all of your crew members participate in regular, documented safety training sessions.

Here are a few more facts about roadway work zone injuries and fatalities:

- Nationwide studies indicate that driver inattention is the single biggest factor in work zone crashes. Excessive speed is the second biggest cause.
- The most common type of accidents in roadway work zones are rear-end collisions.
- More than 40 percent of work zone crashes take place in the transition zone just before the work area.

### What to do

Although much national emphasis has been placed on crashes in work zones adjacent to busy roadways, parking vehicles or equipment on any road puts your crew members at risk of being struck by a motor vehicle.

At Formecology, a landscape design, build and care firm in Evansville, Wis., employees are instructed to park trucks and other vehicles in as safe a location as possible. Even in low-traffic residential areas, crew members place safety cones or other barriers around

"spotters" or "signalers" indicating when it is safe. This is especially important because at least some crew members will likely be working on foot.

- Maintain all vehicles and equipment in good working condition. Ensure that alarms, lights and other devices are working properly. Train crew leaders to immediately take unsafe vehicles or equipment out of service. Require equipment operators to wear seat belts and to use rollover protection and other safety devices as recommended by the manufacturer.

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parked vehicles on roads. Wearing orange vests and staying within the marked area when walking to and from parked vehicles and equipment will also reduce the risk of injury.

Here are some tips for landscape contractors who work near roadways:

- Require crew leaders to hold brief, on-site tailgate training sessions at the start of each workday. Have crew members sign off on an attendance sheet. These sessions should be specific to the work being done, identifying hazards and potential hazards that day and discussing other relevant safety issues.
- Review and plan tasks so that vehicles and equipment back up as little as possible. Backing incidents are common in our industry and can often be prevented. If vehicles do need to back up, ensure that there are designated

- Provide crews with safety cones and other safety devices. Cones or barrels, warning signs for vehicle and equipment entrances and similar equipment are critical. Equipment that is used at night should also have both reflective tape and appropriate lighting, such as amber revolving lights.

- Provide high-quality protective gear for workers. This includes hard hats, safety glasses, hearing protection and high-visibility, reflective vests. Hard hats must have reflectors for work that is done at night. Regularly inspect high-visibility clothing to make sure the color has not faded and the reflective properties have not been lost.

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