Work zone safety for road construction workers: 7 essential tips.

Maintaining work zone safety for road construction workers can be challenging. Heavy equipment, surrounding traffic, and unpredictable weather conditions all present dangerous hazards to your crew. But with careful planning, employee education, and the right gear, you can make your worksite both safer and more productive. Start with these seven safety tips:

1. Have a plan, and make sure everyone knows it. At the beginning of any road project, create a strategy for work zone safety, including traffic control, safety protocols, mandatory safety gear, and emergency/first aid procedures. Then gather your crew for a safety meeting and spell out your plan, step by step.

Don't expect your workers to remember everything from one meeting. To keep safety top of mind, have a quick reminder safety meeting at the start of each workday.

2. Appoint a safety supervisor. Every road construction worksite should have a safety supervisor, or what the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) refers to as a "competent person." This person should have the training and experience to identify existing and predictable safety hazards, as well as the authority to correct them. Ideally, there should be more than one member of your crew who qualifies as a competent person in case your appointed supervisor misses work or must leave the worksite for any reason.

3. Make your workers and worksite highly visible. Be sure your workers wear high-visibility clothing

such as vests, hats, and armbands in fluorescent colors and/or reflective materials. Alert drivers to your worksite by clearly marking its perimeter with prominent cones and barriers, and place road work warning signs far enough away from the worksite to give drivers plenty of time to prepare for lane closures and/or slower speed limits. All cones, barriers, and signs should comply with the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. When work is done at night or in conditions of low visibility (such as fog), make sure the worksite is well lit and your workers are wearing reflective material.

4. Create separate work areas. Using cones, barriers, and barrels, designate separate work areas for different activities, such as materials storage, heavy equipment use, and vehicle parking. Create a safe walkway area as well, to protect workers on foot from heavy equipment.

5. Provide proper safety equipment for all workers. To ensure work zone safety for road construction workers, make sure they're wearing the right safety gear, such as:

- Hard hats
- Steel-toed boots
- Gloves
- Earmuffs or earplugs (for worksites with extreme construction noise)
- Respirators (for projects with hazardous dust)
- High-visibility vests, armbands, etc. (see #3)
- Fall protection equipment when working above six feet

Workers should check that everything fits properly and that it stays in place throughout the workday.

6. Train workers to work safely with heavy equipment. Road construction workers operate and share space with large, heavy machines such as excavators and road rollers. These machines are not only dangerous because of their size, but also because they have significant blind spots. Follow these safety precautions:

For operators:

- Always wear a seat belt
- Apply the parking brake when not in use
- After parking equipment on an incline or decline, put blocks behind or in front of tires
- Use a spotter to help you when moving equipment or loading/unloading it
- Make sure all mirrors are properly adjusted and taillights are functional

For other workers on the worksite:

- Never assume that the operator sees you
- Know where the blind spots are on heavy equipment and avoid them
- If you must walk around heavy equipment, first make eye contact with the operator and signal your intentions

7. Keep workers hydrated. Especially in warmer weather, dehydration poses a serious health risk to road construction workers. Make sure plenty of water is available on the worksite and remind workers to drink water regularly. Even in cooler weather, workers can get dehydrated from hours of exertion and fluid loss, so make water breaks mandatory on your worksite.

Following these best practices for work zone safety will help keep injuries and health issues to a minimum for your workers. For comprehensive commercial insurance, find a local, independent agent near you.