TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of April 11, 2016– Flagger Responsibilities

With Election Day approaching at a probably all-to-fast pace, we are hearing more talk about our Nation's crumbling infrastructure and that funding to repair our roads has become a priority. Whether this happens sooner or later, it seems inevitable that we will be seeing construction workers dressed in vibrant dayglow vests with reflective material becoming more prevalent on our highways and city streets. And while such repair work is, indeed, important, and even desired by just about anyone that uses our nation's roads, it is unlikely that anyone will be looking forward to the traffic jams and commuter delays that such activities will predictably cause.

Typical reasons for the dreaded bottlenecking is that roads and lane closures will be necessary, allowing construction repairs to occur as well as providing proper access for the various construction equipment to proceed in and out of the designated work zones. Sounds like chaos. But as chaotic as such occurrences may be, without the use of flaggers to help direct the flow of traffic, nerve-raking events can easily turn into harmful consequences.

If you are designated as a flagger, you have been tasked with a very important responsibility. Failure to perform your assigned duties properly can result in devastation, including severe injury and loss of life. Other adverse consequences could be work shut-downs (resulting in substantial and even prohibitive costs), as well as having a contract revoked, which, in turn, could result in severe penalties for your organization, including legal issues that could prohibit bidding for other future work opportunities.

Flaggers are assigned to provide traffic control to protect pedestrians, motorists and those performing the vital work on and near the roads. And while flaggers are present to protect all these people, they, themselves are constantly being placed in harms' way as they are the first persons that a motorist may accidentally come in contact with (recent statistics indicate that at least 20 flaggers are killed each year). Therefore, flaggers need to be properly protected.

Drivers should be warned in advance with signs that there will be a flagger ahead. Flaggers should use STOP/SLOW paddles, paddles with lights, or flags (flags should be used only in emergencies.) The STOP sign should be octagonal with a red background and white letters and border. The SLOW sign is the same shape, with an orange background and black letters and a border

Flaggers should be trained and certified with the proper use of signaling methods (per the local state or municipality). Workers on foot, equipment operators, and drivers in internal work zones need to know the routes that construction vehicles will use. Equipment operators and signal persons need to know the hand signals used on the worksite. Operators and workers need to know the visibility limits and the "blind spots" for each vehicle on site. Workers need to wear high visibility safety garments designated as class 1, 2, or 3. In addition, workers should be made aware of the ways in which shiftwork and night work may affect their performance.

One of the most important pieces of clothing a flagger needs to wear is high visibility vests. These items are typically designed with a background of fluorescent orange-red or yellow-green and

retroreflective material of orange, yellow, white, silver, or yellow-green. In areas of traffic movement, this personal protective equipment will make the worker visible for at least 1,000 feet, so that the worker can be seen from any direction, and make the worker stand out from the background. Many people do not know that these vests have specific ratings. Safety vests are certified by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and have one of three classifications (Class 1, 2, and 3).

Class 1 vests are for workers whose job puts them at the lowest risk level. These would be jobs in areas where traffic is traveling at or below 25 mph, and work is taking place at a safe distance from a roadway. An example of this type of work would be sidewalk repair in a small residential neighborhood. According to ANSI, A Class 1 safety vest must be either bright yellow or orange and have a minimum of 155 square inches of reflective tape. These reflective strips must go around the middle of the vest as well as over the shoulder and are designed to cover the torso only. Sleeves are NOT required.

A Class 2 vest is intended for working environments that pose a greater risk. This can include workers who are on a roadway where traffic is moving under 50 mph. These vests are larger than their class 1 counterparts because they require more high visibility and reflective areas to be present. A Class 2 vest must have at least 775 square inches (approximately 5.25 square feet) of bright yellow or orange background material and 201 square inches of reflective striping. These vests are commonly worn by survey crews, airport baggage handlers, and school crossing guards.

Class 3 vests are reserved for people working in the most dangerous environments where visibility is the highest priority. This includes roadways where traffic is traveling in excess of 50 mph, but may also apply to emergency personnel or tow truck operators working in a blizzard or a hurricane condition where visibility is very restricted or minimum. A Class 3 vest is the largest of the ANSI vests because it requires the most background fabric and reflective striping. Because a class 3 vest requires 1,240 square inches (approximately 8.6 square feet) of yellow or orange background and 310 square inches of reflective striping, it often resembles a short sleeve t-shirt more than a traditional vest. Many times Class 3 vests are full length jackets with sleeves extended to the wrist.

Should your project be tasked to provide traffic control, the major source in the United States for information regarding compliance and protecting persons is the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The MUTCD provides information from proper signs to countless road set-up configurations for the vast number of traffic scenarios (such as lane closures on freeways, intersections, etc.). Many municipalities require that flaggers are trained to this publication (with the greatest emphasis on Section 6). The MUTCD can be found at:

http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/kno_2009r1r2.htm. The MUTCD is an extensive document, packed with lots of information and consisting of close to 900 pages.

The one exclusive sign of thorough knowledge is the power of teaching -
Aristotle