

## Stangland: Safe driving critical for road crews

Contributed by Steve Stangland  
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Slow for the cone zone. It's not just a catchy slogan; it's a way of life for your highway workers, no matter if they work for Caltrans, the county or the cities. This phrase came about to highlight the numerous highway worker deaths that occur each year.

Think about this: Over a 23-year span 1,800 law enforcement officers nationwide were killed in the line of duty, that's an average of 78 officers a year.

As terrible of a tragedy as that is, it gets worse. Over a nine-year span 1,090 firefighters nationwide were killed in the line of duty, that's an average of 121 per year.

And as tragic as this loss is, in a six-year period 841 highway workers nationwide were killed while performing their jobs to make it safe for you and your family to get to work, school or to the grocery store! That's an average of 140 preventable deaths per year!

These people were not killed by a bank robber, nor were they killed by the walls of a building that were weakened by the fire they were fighting. These men and women were killed by average, law abiding citizens that were inattentive, talking on the cell phone, in a hurry or just plain upset for being delayed in their daily lives. In other words, they were killed by people like you and me.

Why am I bringing this to your attention? On Aug. 6, one of Lake County's own public works staff had a serious medical emergency, and collapsed while performing traffic control during re-paving operations at the intersection of Soda Bay Road, South Main Street and Highway 175 in Lakeport. This individual was at the far end of the project, away from their coworkers and collapsed in the street.

I'm telling you about this because not a single person cared enough to stop their car and get out to help this worker! Not a single one of our "neighbors" could take the time out of their busy, hectic schedule to help this person and just swerved around them! What if the next car didn't see you swerve and ran over this person? And yes, I've heard all of the jokes: "Well they were probably on break" or "is it so unusual to see a road worker lying down."

As humorous as these jokes are this could have been a very serious tragedy for Lake County!

I want you to consider this, Lake County: each and every worker on the roads is someone's son, daughter, father, mother, brother, sister, etc. Let's not let them be another statistic!

Consider this: What would happen if there were no street, road or highway workers? How would the police get to your home when the bad guy is robbing you? How would the ambulance and fire trucks get to your home when you need them? How will you get to work, school and to the grocery store without them? Who will come out and plow the snow or cut out the tree across the road in the middle of the night? With out your road crew workers &hellip; NO ONE!

Highway workers are killed or seriously injured every year close to home. This year a Caltrans worker was seriously injured by a person that was in to much of a hurry to be delayed by road work, and tried to pass cars in a construction zone, lost control of her vehicle and crushed a worker against the guard rail. When asked about the accident, her reply was, "Well he should have gotten out of the way quicker!" The list of workers killed or injured in adjoining counties to us goes on and on.

As your road superintendent, I have the responsibility and duty to safe guard the county's workers to the best of my abilities. The Department of Public Works has always attempted to do this with the least amount of delay and inconvenience to you the traveling public, but if the danger to our crews becomes too great we will be forced to close roads while repairs and maintenance are being performed.

I am asking &ndash; no, I'm imploring &ndash; each and every citizen in Lake County to team with your streets, roads and highway workers to keep not only them but you safe!

The Lake County Department of Public Works would like to thank the staff of Rotten Robbie's gas and mini mart for coming to the aid of our family member.

Steve Stangland is road superintendent for the Lake County Department of Public Works.