

ROADWAY SAFETY FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS EMPLOYEES

INTRODUCTION

Distracted driving leads to close calls and tragic losses on our roads every day. Whether it's a driver running a stop sign or drifting into oncoming traffic, such incidents are increasing nationwide. In particular, studies show that texting while driving is as dangerous as drunk driving and has contributed to rising traffic fatalities after years of decline.

Public Safety and Public Works personnel regularly work along roadways and are at a much greater risk of injury or death than workers in other professions.

Although laws such as Michigan's Move Over Law help reduce risk to these employees, distracted driving remains a serious and persistent hazard. The following risk control measures outline steps to help departments and employees stay safe on and near the road.

POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Traffic stops, traffic crash response, and roadside assistance events are high-risk activities. Bright, flashing emergency lights warn motorists of potential danger but can also draw inattentive drivers to unconsciously steer toward the scene.

To help reduce hazards to employees working in or near a roadway, the following recommended safety measures should be implemented before and during an incident:

Vehicle Equipment and Safety Gear

- Ensure all vehicles are equipped with adequate emergency lighting, flares, and high-visibility ANSI-compliant vests. For firefighters, turnout gear alone is not sufficient.
- Verify that all personnel are trained in the proper use of this equipment.

Scene Management

- For traffic stops, use the patrol vehicle as a blocker when possible.
- For traffic crashes, park a large apparatus upstream to shield responders from traffic. (See the MML Risk Control Solution [Highway Emergency Scene Apparatus Placement](#) for more in-depth information.)
- Personnel should avoid standing between vehicles during stops.

- Direct drivers to safer side roads when in hilly or curved areas.
- If you must remove individuals from their vehicle, ensure they stand off the roadway, well away from traffic.
- Direct non-emergency services personnel to positions off the roadway, in a safe location.
- Be especially vigilant in low-visibility conditions (fog, rain, snow, or darkness).
- Ensure all personnel wear high-visibility ANSI-compliant vests.
- Ensure responding agencies coordinate traffic control and each is aware of specific traffic control duties.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW)

DPW employees may spend a large portion of their days working on or near the roadway, including areas from the sidewalk into the road itself. A safety mindset is vital to protect these workers.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- All DPW workers must wear ANSI-compliant vests, hard hats, safety glasses, and steel-toed boots.
- Equipment should be supplied to employees and maintained in good condition.
- Supervisors should obtain replacement PPE as needed.

Pre-Job Safety Checks

- Confirm availability and condition of all traffic control devices before starting work.
- Review project-specific hazards during pre-construction safety briefings.
- Hold safety meetings each day prior to work beginning.

Communication and Public Awareness

- Notify local media before large-scale projects to reduce unexpected traffic.
- Use multiple news outlets, such as print media, television, and social media, to share information.

Traffic Control Devices and Site Planning

- Use signs, barrels, cones, barricades, attenuators, and arrow boards per MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices) standards.
- Place warning signs at a distance of 100 feet for every 10 mph of posted speed. In hilly or curved areas, place signs at a distance of 200 feet for every 10 mph of posted speed.

- Ensure all crash avoidance and signaling devices are charged, functional, and properly spaced.
- Deploy blocker vehicles. The heaviest vehicle should be the last in line for rolling operations.
- Ensure flaggers are trained and alert, not distracted by phones or radios.

EMPLOYEE DISTRACTION AND LIABILITY CONTROL


Municipalities face potential liability exposure for negligent operation of government-owned vehicles. A policy should be instituted that addresses various aspects of driving a municipal vehicle. The policy should cover training, restrictions, and standards that must be met to operate a vehicle. (Please see the Risk Control Solution four-part series [Vehicle Operation – Reducing the Risk](#) for risk reduction measures.)

CONCLUSION

Distracted driving endangers everyone: motorists, responders, and road workers alike. With Michigan's ongoing infrastructure needs, emergency services, road, and utility work will continue to expose employees to roadway hazards. Consistent training, policy enforcement, and situational awareness are key to protecting them and reducing liability.

Your employees' safety depends on preparation, vigilance, and adherence to the risk control measures outlined above.

***Contact MML Risk Management Services Staff
or your Loss Control Consultant for more information.***

 Important Phone Numbers	
MML Risk Management Services	800.653.2483
Loss Control Services	800.482.2726

Note:

***This document is not intended to be legal advice.
It only identifies some of the issues surrounding this topic.
Public agencies are encouraged to review their procedures with an expert
or a competent attorney who is knowledgeable about the subject.***