



# Kansas LTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Road & Bridge Agencies

## Consistent Signing in Work Zones = Consistent Driver Expectancy

By Lisa Harris

**S**igns in a work zone communicate to the drivers what actions they are supposed to take. They also alert drivers to workers in the area. With those benefits, are work zone signs ever a bad thing? The answer is yes, if the signs indicate workers are in the area, but they are not. This article will explain why. This topic was suggested by Kelly Gaer, KDOT safety coordinator.

### What happens when signs are not consistent with what's really happening?

When signs indicate an active work zone and no one is working, drivers get complacent and they lose caution, said Gaer. Driver complacency increases risk in a work zone, and endangers workers. Drivers may drive 2-3 times through a signed work zone with no workers there, and stop paying attention.

### Is consistency just common sense, or is it a regulation?

Signing consistent with work zone conditions is a federal requirement, per the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Part 6, Section 6B, addresses having necessary signs in place, and taking them down when they don't communicate the actual conditions.

Before any new detour or temporary route is opened to traffic, all necessary signs shall be in place.

All TTC devices shall be removed as soon as practical when they are no longer needed. When work is suspended for short periods of time, TTC devices that are no longer appropriate shall be removed or covered. (Sect. 6B.01 08-09)

### When a contractor does not follow the MUTCD for temporary traffic control (TTC), who is liable in the case of an incident?

We asked this question of Kristi Ericksen, TTC engineer for KDOT, who is responsible for working with contractors and communicating contractor responsibilities for TTC. She said both the contractor and the agency are liable, but you can reduce share of agency liability by clearly spelling out your expectations in your construction contract with the contractor. KDOT does that, following its KDOT Standard Specification and Construction Manual. This manual has useful guidance for any agency, and is available for reference, for \$5 on CD or \$30 hard copy. The order form is here: <http://kdotapp.ksdot.org/StdSpecsConsManForm/default.aspx>.

### Tips for consistent and safer work zone signing

- Gaer recommends that you drive through your contractors' work zones to make sure they are set up properly. He suggested doing that for your own work zones, as well. "You might see things you missed, like having a right lane closed sign posted when it is really the left lane this is closed," he said. "These things can happen." KDOT trains its crews to follow this practice on its own jobs.
- Make sure you are following the MUTCD Part 6. Signs should be out only when workers are working. If they are not working, including when flaggers go to lunch, take the signs down, cover them, or turn them away from traffic, Gaer said.
- Some utility companies have been known to leave their



### THE MUTCD ADDRESSES WORKER SAFETY IN WORK ZONES

The MUTCD's Section 6D.03 "Worker Safety Considerations" is dedicated to safety for crewmembers. This section recommends, when possible, separation of workers operating moving equipment from workers on foot, using TTC devices (and training for using them), and using high-visibility safety apparel. This section also states the importance of training employees about hazards working next to moving traffic in a work zone and the importance of designating a safety person on your staff to plan the TTC zone.



signs up when workers are not present. The traveling public needs consistency in every work zone. Talk with the utility company if they are not following the MUTCD.

- Be careful when setting up signs. This is one of the most dangerous jobs in a work zone, Gaer said. “At KDOT we encourage our employees to work with a buddy or spotter, especially when setting out signs so they can watch for traffic. We put out the signs first, then get flaggers in place to divert traffic off a lane, then work in the blocked lane to set out cones. The employees placing the initial signs are the most exposed.”

### **Conclusion**

It is in your agency’s best interest to follow the MUTCD and cover or remove or turn around work zone signs when workers are not present. This practice provides better safety for your workers, it communicates to drivers the actual conditions in the area, and it helps protect your agency in terms of liability.

### **For more information**

More information can be found in the MUTCD Part 6 at the link below. ■

Reprinted from the Summer 2015 issue of the *Kansas LTAP Newsletter*, a publication of the Kansas Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.



Sources:

- Interviews with Kelly Gaer on 7-2-15 and Kristi Ericksen on 7-6-15.
- Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) Part 6. 2009 edition. <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009/part6.pdf>