

Work Zone Safety

BACKGROUND

A police officer who was working an extra-duty road construction job was struck and killed by a small SUV traveling in the work-zone.

SCENARIO

There were two (2) Police Officers assigned to work an overtime/extra-duty assignment for a town road paving project. The project involved a two lane road being reduced to one. It was near the end of the shift, late in the day, at dusk. It was dark enough to restrict vision, but not dark enough for the street lights to be activated or to require the use of head lights. A light rain had been falling since noon and most cars had their headlights on.

One officer was positioned at each end of the work zone, and both were equipped with portable radio communications. The officers were assigned to control the traffic flow through the work zone. This was accomplished throughout the shift by one officer stopping traffic to allow for safe passage of vehicles from the other side, and then alternating. The officers would communicate to each other via the portable radios as to when to stop traffic or allow traffic to proceed through.

At 6:00 pm, a small SUV was signaled by the officer on the north side of the work zone to proceed through. Unfortunately, the northbound officer did not communicate to the southbound officer that the SUV was entering the lane. The northbound officer later explained that he looked down the roadway and did not see the second officer or any traffic waiting, so he thought it was safe for the SUV to proceed. The northbound officer further explained that he thought the second officer was in his personal vehicle getting ready to leave.

The southbound officer was struck by the SUV vehicle, when he stepped into the open lane. The officer was thrown to the ground, striking his head and, although EMS arrived shortly thereafter and transported him to a trauma center, the officer unfortunately succumbed to his injuries.

LESSONS LEARNED

- It was determined that the injured police officer was not wearing any high visibility clothing or reflective vests as required by the Department of Transportation.
- Additionally, proper communication between officers did not take place for safe passing of traffic through the work zone.

OFFICER SAFETY RISK MANAGEMENT

Wear the proper ANSI Class High Visibility/Reflective clothing and vests, as required by the Department of Transportation, when working in roadways.

Ensure that proper communication is made throughout the dynamic work-zone at all times. Constant communication, even when it appears your partner is not in harm's way, will ensure that each officer completes the assignment safely.

Questions? Ask your Supervisor or contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant at (203) 946-3700.