

Groundbreaker

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THE SAFETY ISSUE



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Traffic control safety: Get the 'behind-the-cones' perspective



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TRAFFIC CONTROL SAFETY

Keeping highway construction zones safe for workers, pedestrians and motorists alike

BY HEATHER HUDSON

There is a great deal required for safely controlling traffic on a highway construction site in Manitoba.

Work crews and their heavy equipment must share the road with speeding cars, unobservant drivers and large transport trailers. Every day the crews have to adjust to extreme hot or cold temperatures and deal with the wind or rain, which all pose serious hazards to the work crew if traffic control is not properly managed.





“It’s always beneficial to stay on top of new emerging trends in our industry, particularly to advance roadway safety.”

– Tana LaDouceur, Traffic Control Coordinator,
Nelson River Construction

That’s where Tana LaDouceur comes in. She is a certified traffic control coordinator for Nelson River Construction, which specializes in a number of construction areas, including aggregate production, highway construction, concrete, paving and underground services. She and her colleagues in traffic control management keep construction sites safe for everyone.

A new certification requirement for traffic control coordinators has been mandated by Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation. As of June 1, 2013, Level 4 or 5 road construction projects must have a certified traffic control coordinator who has taken a two-day traffic control coordinator course through the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association (MHCA)’s WORKSAFELY™ program.

“It’s always beneficial to stay on top of new emerging trends in our industry, particularly to advance roadway safety,” says LaDouceur, who has taken the training.

But not just anyone can do this job. Many factors and responsibilities must be taken into consideration for each and every project.

Coordinating traffic

LaDouceur’s key role as a traffic control coordinator is to ensure proper traffic control devices are placed on a roadway to enhance the safety of workers, pedestrians and motorists. She attends a pre-construction meeting to find out exactly what it will entail and how many kilometres the project will stretch. This helps her determine how many trained flaggers she’ll need and help her prepare and submit a traffic management plan (TMP) to the highway authority. The TMP is required for lane closures, speed reduction zones and traffic control device placements.

“We place temporary traffic control devices and throughout the day we tweak the traffic control plan as necessary,” LaDouceur says.

There are three basic principles of traffic control that apply on every roadway construction project:

1) Setting up advance warning signs for motorists

There are new highly visible fluorescent green signs that must be placed at locations visible to motorists to attract their attention. The two signs most commonly used are “Roadwork Ahead” and “Flag Person Ahead.” These signs must be placed at certain distances based on vehicle travel speeds.

2) Setting up worksite identification high visible cones

The site of the entire area where crews conduct their work activities must be clearly marked. This marked area is their workplace and the motoring public needs to be mindful and respectful of that.

3) Directing or providing clear driver guidance using trained flag persons

Any oncoming traffic must be safely guided around and through the construction work zone. New flag person training standards set out the role and responsibility of a flag person and how they are to guide motorists safely through a construction site. Under the new requirements, personal protective equipment worn by the flag person must be a highly visible fluorescent colour.

Another key factor in keeping everyone safe is communication. LaDouceur ensures each flagger is equipped with a radio to ensure proper communication for any adjustments that need to be made throughout the day.


“Even if we change something for two minutes, everybody must know what’s going on. And if any of them see something that’s not right or dangerous, they can radio,” says LaDouceur.

She always parols the stretch of the construction zone, adjusting flaggers as necessary.

“My traffic control coordinator’s job isn’t over when the day is done. Near the end of the night, I can tell where I’m going to start the next day and set it all up before I go in for the night,” she explains.

A meeting with all flaggers once a week is set up to offer an overview on how the job is going as well as to seek feedback about any hazards they’ve noticed that can be adjusted.

“If you’ve got 70 guys on the crew, you can’t be in 70 places at once. Sometimes they do things they don’t realize affect traffic control or can be dangerous to flaggers or drivers,” says LaDouceur.

With years of expertise and training, LaDouceur says it’s rewarding to ensure work sites are set up in a safe manner so all employees can feel safe in the construction zone. 

For more information on traffic control coordinator training, contact Glen Black, director of WORKSAFELY™ education and training at 204-594-9051.