



# TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
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## Traveling? ‘Steer Clear’ of Road Crews, Emergency Responders

It’s that time of year again, and you know what that means: Township road crews will be out in full force, patching potholes and paving streets.

And while you may be tempted to speed past barricades and workers, here are some sobering statistics to keep in mind:

- The Federal Highway Administration reports that more than 20,000 workers are injured in road construction work zones each year.

- PennDOT says that in 2010, there were 1,886 vehicle crashes in work zones across Pennsylvania, including 110 on local roads. Four of the 23 resulting deaths were workers.

As one township official put it: “People need to slow down, pay attention to the speed limit and work area signs, and realize there are human beings there whose safety depends on the driver’s compliance with the work zone safety laws.”

But even the most conscientious drivers can be thrown for a loop when they see a change in the traffic pattern or encounter an accident — even on a rural road.

“Work zones and accident scenes create an unusual or unexpected event for motorists,” says Mark Hood, a senior traffic safety engineer with Pennoni Associates Inc., a civil engineering firm based in Philadelphia. “Any time you introduce that, your risk starts to increase. When you combine that with drivers who are inattentive or driving too fast and taking certain things for

granted, you have a recipe for high risk.”

That’s why it’s a good idea to brush up on the rules of the road before jumping in the car this summer for picnics, vacations, and shopping trips.

### Make sure you ‘steer clear’

Pennsylvania has several statutes that are aimed at protecting road crews and motorists alike.

The commonwealth’s work zone safety laws, for instance, require drivers to turn on their headlights when entering posted work areas.

These laws also include stiff penalties for



**Make safety a priority when traveling township roads this summer, especially when you encounter work zones and accident scenes.**

reckless drivers. Not only do they face a 15-day suspension of their driver's license, but fines are also doubled for certain traffic violations, including speeding, driving under the influence, and failure to obey traffic devices. Also, anyone convicted of homicide by vehicle for a crash that occurs in an active work zone may receive up to five years of additional jail time.

In 2011 alone, 571 motorists had their license suspended for work-zone violations, PennDOT reports.

In addition to work zone safety laws, Pennsylvania has a Steer Clear Law. This statute, enacted in 2006, requires motorists to use caution at the scene of an emergency, a traffic stop, or a disabled vehicle being assisted by emergency responders.

The law requires drivers to move into the left lane when first responders are stopped on the right shoulder. If drivers cannot move over because of traffic or other conditions, the law requires them to reduce their speed.

Many drivers, however, are unfamiliar with the law. In fact, the Mason Dixon Polling and Research Company reports that although 49 states have enacted "steer clear" or "move over" laws, 71 percent of Americans did not know the statutes existed.

Pennsylvania's Steer Clear Law applies any time an emergency vehicle has its lights flashing or

where road crews or emergency personnel have set up flares, signs, or other traffic control devices.

Failure to move over or slow down can result in a summary offense that carries a fine of up to \$250. Fines are doubled for traffic violations that occur in construction zones. If a worker is injured during the violation, the driver could have his license suspended for 90 days.

In addition, when law enforcement isn't present, Steer Clear allows road crews and emergency responders to report violations. Law enforcement can issue citations based on these reports.

More than 7,100 citations have been issued since Steer Clear went into effect in 2006.

### Be safe

The bottom line is, motorists must use caution when they see emergency responders, law enforcement, fire officials, emergency medical technicians, tow truck operators, highway workers, or any emergency vehicle along the road.

"After all, these professionals put their lives on the line to protect and serve the public every day," Pennsylvania State Police Commissioner Frank Noonan says. "Slowing down or changing lanes to give road crews and first responders enough room to work safely is the least motorists can do in return."

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## Townships Go to Bat for Taxpayers, Take Aim at Unfunded Mandates

Wearing stickers that proclaimed they were serious about taking aim at unfunded mandates, hundreds of Pennsylvania township officials traveled to the State Capitol Complex in Harrisburg recently to ask lawmakers for relief for their communities.

The group, representing the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, was in the capital region for the Association's 90<sup>th</sup> Annual Educational Conference and Trade Show, held in early May.

"Township officials went to Harrisburg to fight for their communities...to fight for taxpayers whose hard-earned dollars finance a whole host of outrageous, forced unfunded mandates, including the prevailing wage and outdated legal advertising requirements," PSATS Executive Director David M. Sanko said. "Townships are tired of wasting money on these frivolous expenses when they could be using those dollars to pave a road or build a park. Laws need to change, and that's

exactly what our members are aiming for."

PSATS President Les Houck agreed: "Harrisburg doesn't want to raise taxes, so what does it do? It passes mandates — unfunded ones, at that — onto Pennsylvania's municipalities. Then what happens? We either have to cut services or ask taxpayers for money to cover these unfair costs. It's not right, and it has to stop."

While reforming Pennsylvania's 50-year-old Prevailing Wage Act is chief among PSATS' legislative priorities, township officials also want Harrisburg to reform binding arbitration, another money-waster; ease up on a complex permitting process that gets in the way of flood prevention strategies; and create a reliable and predictable transportation funding stream.

