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Construction Zone: Road Hazards Ahead

By Cathy Dausman



Photo Cathy Dausman

It is a time-worn joke: There are only two seasons - winter and road construction. It's certainly not winter in Lamorinda, but driving through construction zones isn't a joke either, as drivers navigate area streets in the face of multiple ongoing construction projects.

One Orinda resident suspects that an accident in her city that totaled two cars earlier this month may have occurred in part because of nearby road construction. And Moraga is busy patching, repairing, resurfacing or restriping over 100 streets, the equivalent of 14 miles, with work scheduled to continue into the year 2015.

The day this article was written, 10 or more streets were affected. That same day at least three sets of cones slowed traffic along Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette. Additionally two flaggers directed traffic at the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Reliez Station Road. Heavy machinery crisscrossed the area as workers progressed on a months-long utility construction project staged nearby.

Of the three Lamorinda communities, Orinda was least impacted by construction cone zones. "We're not doing a big paving project right now," explained Orinda Public Works Inspector Tod Fierner.

Fierner could recall only one area where traffic might slow for construction - Altarinda Road near the site of the old city offices. That area would be affected periodically for a while, he said. Fierner added that Camino Pablo would also be impacted for just one day during the last week of August.

Alfred is a traffic technician for Bay Area Traffic Solutions. A flagger for over two years, he was recently stationed along Olympic Boulevard. "Ninety percent [of the drivers] obey you," he said. He wishes drivers would be "more aware" of their surroundings, and indicated the three sets of orange warning signs leading up to the cone zone. "It never dies down," he said of the traffic flow.

"Without us here drivers would be going 40 to 45 miles per hour," he said. "I tell people, 'Imagine if that was your daughter or son [trying to cross the street],'" adding, "You have to have a lot of patience for this job." Two hundred feet down the road, Alfred's coworker Terrance was in radio contact. Although "most [drivers] respect the traffic zone," Terrance had seen both excessive speeding and an "awful lot" of unlawful automobile cell phone use, he said.

Last year, police wrote out hundreds of speeding and cell phone violation tickets.

Asked about construction zone driving, Moraga police chief Robert Priebe cited California Vehicle Code section 22362, which deals with operating a vehicle in excess of the posted speed limit along a highway. Locally, Priebe said "all drivers need to be aware of their obligations to drive safely at all times, and to be alert to changing speed limits and the possibilities associated with persons and equipment in construction zones."

California Department of Motor Vehicles posts information on the regulation of traffic in a construction zone online at www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/hdbk/shr_ped_work.htm and the California Department of Transportation developed its Slow for the Cone Zone campaign which is detailed below and at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/maint/workzone.

Work Zone Safety Tips

- Do not speed in work zones; obey the posted speed limits.
- Stay alert! Expect the unexpected.
- Watch for workers; drive with caution.
- Don't change lanes unnecessarily.
- Avoid using mobile phones while driving in work zones.
- Turn on headlights so that workers and other drivers can see you.
- Be especially alert at night while driving in work zones.
- Expect delays, especially during peak travel times.
- Allow ample space between you and the car in front of you.
- Anticipate lane shifts, and merge when directed to do so.
- Be patient!

Source: California Department of Transportation



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