

Ensuring road workers safety

Paul Mitchell, head of health and safety at the Highways Agency talks about their 'Aiming for Zero' initiative and how far it has come since launching in 2009

Aiming for Zero sets an unambiguous goal for the Agency's health and safety performance – that as an employer, designer and a leading client, nobody comes to harm as a result of their work for us.

Traditionally, the main focus of health and safety at the Highways Agency had been on the construction and maintenance operatives within our supply chain – Aiming for Zero has expanded it to encompass our entire operation, especially since the introduction of the Highways Agency Traffic Officer Service.

We've had to factor in the fact that the role of traffic officers is different to that of our supply chain operatives. They are often required to work without the benefit of a coned off and protected environment, as is more often the case with construction and maintenance crews.

Many of the organisations we work with have their own accident reduction strategies. Aiming for Zero supports and draws from these and confirms the Agency's leadership role in the industry.



Paul Mitchell is the head of health and safety at the Highways Agency

Fact box

The Highways Agency puts this advice to drivers on all of its publications:

Safety at roadworks: The Highways Agency is working with the industry and road users to reduce the risks of working on the roads. For the safety of road workers and all road users, when you are approaching roadworks:

- ➔ **Keep within the speed limit** – it is there for your safety.
- ➔ **Get into the correct lane in good time** – don't keep switching.
- ➔ **Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks.**
- ➔ **Be alert for works' traffic leaving or entering roadworks.**
- ➔ **Keep a safe distance** – there could be queues in front.
- ➔ **Observe all signs** – they are there to help you.

What are your biggest challenges?

There are two challenges we really need to focus on. The first is to make sure that operatives carrying out tasks on the strategic road network have a safe environment to work in and that they have the correct tools and training for the job.

We are constantly working with our supply chain to identify innovative solutions to reduce the risk they face. Ultimately we want to remove the need altogether for operatives to be on foot on the live carriageway and we are testing ways in which we can use traffic management vehicles and signs to help achieve this.

The second, and possibly the more difficult of the two challenges, is influencing driver behaviour through roadworks. Often when work is being carried out, there are speed restrictions in place for the protection not only of our workforce, but for drivers as well. One of our key areas of focus is emphasising to drivers that they need to drive with extra care through roadworks. (See fact box below).

Aiming for Zero started in 2009. What have been the most effective changes?

Road workers are at greatest risk of being struck by a moving vehicle at the times when they need to cross the carriageway to place or remove cones and signs or when setting out cone tapers. Through one of the interventions we've adopted, we've cut the need for carriageway crossings by around 40%. And, for some nearside lane closures at the approach to roadworks all the traffic management signs on the central reserve can be safely left out.

One of the ways we've achieved this is by using temporary traffic management signs simplification (TTMSS). A number of our service providers in the North and Humber areas have deployed TTMSS since it was first introduced in December 2011 via Interim Advice note 150/11. Over a period of time where they monitored their activity they found they reduced the number of carriageway crossings by about 200,000 and cut the time spent by roadworkers on live carriageways by some 2,275 hours.

A crash cushion being used at night



How are you measuring your success?

Our aspiration is clear – we are striving to achieve a position where none of our workforce are injured doing their job.

How do we achieve that? We have already come a long way by reducing carriageway crossings but this work is ongoing and we continue to look for even more innovative techniques to reduce the risks.

There is a wide range of activity taking place under the governance of the Road Workers' Safety Forum (RoWSaF) to remove or reduce the need for road workers to be on the live carriageway to carry out their work. These are being carried out for all types of road on the strategic road network.

Another way we measure our success is to monitor the safety performance of our service providers. Here are three noteworthy examples of our contractors recently reaching significant milestones for hours worked without a RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) reportable incident.

- Our Area 13 managing agent contractor EnterpriseMouchel, which maintains our roads in Cumbria and north Lancashire, has achieved one million RIDDOR-free hours at work.
- Amey, which maintains our technology assets in the West Midlands, has achieved 400,000 RIDDOR-free hours with its TechMAC contract.
- Our A46 Newark to Widmerpool improvement scheme, has achieved more than 677,000 hours without a RIDDOR incident.

All three are good examples of how our supply chain is working hard to help us achieve our Aiming for Zero strategy.

But despite the significant steps we've taken towards reducing fatalities and serious injuries on the strategic road network we recognise that more needs to be done – although small, the number of fatal and serious injuries continues at an unacceptable level. That's why Aiming for Zero is so important, and why our ambition for it is so crystal clear: one workforce – zero harm. ☹