



Exposed to Traffic: Why Traffic Control Plans Save Lives



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Public streets are among the most dangerous job sites in any industry. Every day, crews work just feet from live traffic while relying on cones, signs, and visibility to stay protected. Each year, passing traffic, distracted drivers, and improperly set up work areas injure thousands of workers in roadway work zones. April is National Work Zone Awareness Month, making it the right time to reinforce one of the most effective tools for preventing serious injuries and fatalities: a well-designed and properly executed Traffic Control Plan (TCP).

What Is a Traffic Control Plan?

A Traffic Control Plan outlines how vehicles, pedestrians, workers, and equipment will move safely through or around a work zone. On public streets, TCPs serve as the primary barrier between workers and moving traffic.

When Traffic Control Plans are missing, incomplete, or not followed, workers are exposed to significant hazards, including:

- Sudden lane shifts and unpredictable traffic patterns
- Limited sight lines due to curves, hills, or weather
- Drivers who are speeding, distracted, or ignoring work zones
- Workers stepping into live traffic without adequate protection

Effective TCPs help anticipate these risks and establish controls before work begins.

Why Traffic Control Plans Matter on Public Streets

Unlike controlled job sites, public roadways are dynamic and unpredictable. Drivers may not expect lane closures or workers on foot, and conditions can change quickly throughout the day.

A strong Traffic Control Plan helps to:

- Separate workers from traffic as much as possible
- Provide clear, early warning to drivers and pedestrians
- Reduce confusion caused by changing traffic patterns
- Create consistency so workers know where it is safe to work

From a risk management perspective, TCPs are not just a best practice, but they are a frontline defense against serious injuries.

Common Traffic Control Plan Risk Factors

Many roadway incidents share similar root causes. Common TCP-related risk factors include:



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- Working on or near active public roadways
- Inadequate or poorly designed Traffic Control Plans Improper placement or spacing of cones, barrels, or signage
- Missing or insufficient advance warning signs
- Traffic flow changes not communicated to workers
- Reduced visibility from weather, night work, curves, or hills
- Workers entering live traffic lanes without protection

Recognizing these risks early allows supervisors and crews to correct issues before work begins.

Safe Practices for Public Street Work Zones

1. Plan the Work Zone Before Work Begins

- A Traffic Control Plan must be in place before work starts. Plans should follow applicable standards, such as MUTCD guidance, and account for traffic speed, volume, lane closures, pedestrian access, and emergency response.

2. Set Up the Work Zone Correctly

- Crews should begin with advance warning and install signs, cones, barrels, and barriers in the correct sequence and spacing. Devices must be visible, upright, and appropriate for roadway conditions.

3. Maintain Visibility at All Times

- Workers should wear high-visibility apparel suited for lighting and traffic conditions. Vehicles and equipment should use warning lights as required. Never assume a driver sees you.

4. Protect the Workers

- Whenever possible, use physical separation such as barriers, buffer zones, or shadow vehicles. Avoid working with your back to traffic and always maintain a clear escape path.

5. Inspect and Adjust

- Traffic conditions change. Therefore, work zones should be inspected regularly and adjusted for traffic flow, weather, or site conditions. Traffic control devices should be removed or covered when no longer needed.

A Simple Traffic Control Safety Checklist

Before work begins, confirm:

- A Traffic Control Plan is in place and understood
- Advance warning signs are installed and visible
- Cones, barrels, and barriers are properly spaced and maintained
- Workers are wearing high-visibility PPE
- Traffic is separated from workers as much as possible
- Conditions are monitored and the plan is adjusted as needed



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Work Zone Awareness is a Daily Responsibility

Work Zone Awareness Month is a reminder that roadway safety requires constant attention. Drivers make mistakes, traffic patterns shift, and conditions change quickly. A properly set up and consistently followed Traffic Control Plan provides one of the strongest defenses against serious injuries and fatalities.

At Berkley Industrial Comp, we partner with insureds to focus on practical, field-ready risk control strategies that help crews go home safely at the end of the day. Clear planning, visibility, and communication are proven fundamentals that protect workers where the risk is highest.

Public streets are unpredictable. Before work begins, make sure the Traffic Control Plan is in place, the work zone is properly set up, and everyone understands their role. No task is worth stepping into traffic unprotected.

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