Engineering News

Americans with Disabilities Act

SCDOT Engineers take ADA training

The guest instructor asked a training room filled with District employees "In which decade was the last major U.S. civil rights legislation passed?" The correct answer of 'the 1990's' did not immediately come to mind for most participants during the latest round of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training. However Catherine Graham, a rehabilitation engineer with USC, made her point that the ADA is a civil rights law, important for many Americans.

She, along with SCDOT's newly-appointed ADA Coordinator, Natalie Moore of the Legal Office, and Pedestrian and Bicycle Engineer, Tom Dodds, were at District 1 conducting training on accessibility within the public rights-of-way. The January session marked the completion of training in all Districts--training meant to give a better understanding of what it means to have a disability. Building on the legal definition, presenters extended it to the human perspective of persons who may be blind, use a walker, have cognitive impairments, or use a wheelchair to name but a few examples of disability.

While Moore included remarks on the updated ADA policy at the agency, Dodds focused on technical elements found in sidewalk settings which limit accessibility, and on the design and placement of curb ramps. Many employees appreciated the perspective provided by Graham, a wheelchair user herself. Attendees used special goggles to simulate certain vision impairments. Others were allowed to navigate around the training sites in a wheelchair to gain a modest insight into the world of a person who lives with a disability.

Billy Nowlen of Kershaw Maintenance said, "In my new job, I will be directly involved with ADA items. Information I got out of this class will certainly help me in this area." This echoed the feelings of many employees who attended.

While this series of classes focused on accessibility issues a citizen with disabilities might face as a pedestrian, similar training was held in the fall of last year to familiarize those employees who are responsible for the numerous SCDOT buildings and other facilities. Tony Garmon of Capital Improvements and Michael Dennis of Planning joined Moore in conducting these sessions.

The increase in this training stems from the 2009 adoption of an updated SCDOT ADA Transition Plan, a guide for the steps that the agency is taking to assure that continued steady progress is being made toward the goal of total accessibility. It gives the schedule for completing key objectives, and the persons responsible, and is a requirement under the law. In addition to the elimination of barriers in the categories of Building and Related Site Elements and the Public Rights-of-Way, SCDOT's Transition Plan also addresses Communications (including the Internet and telecommunications), and Mass Transit. Each section was drafted by a subcommittee from that particular area. These subcommittees were part of an ADA Transition Plan Committee chaired by former Preconstruction Support Engineer Ed Eargle. The current SCDOT ADA Transition Plan and related documents are available on-line at http://www.scdot.org/doing/ada.shtml.

Currently, an inventory of curb ramp locations is being coordinated by the Districts and the Director of Maintenance office.

Catherine Graham explains the effects cross slope has on a person's ability to maneuver a wheelchair. Andrew Boyd, Jason Gamble, Christy Hall and Ben Olson observe.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM DODDS/THE CONNECTOR

Ryan Miller of District 3 experiences travel in a wheelchair as Andrew Boyd assists and Catherine Graham of USC School of Medicine observes.

Got news?

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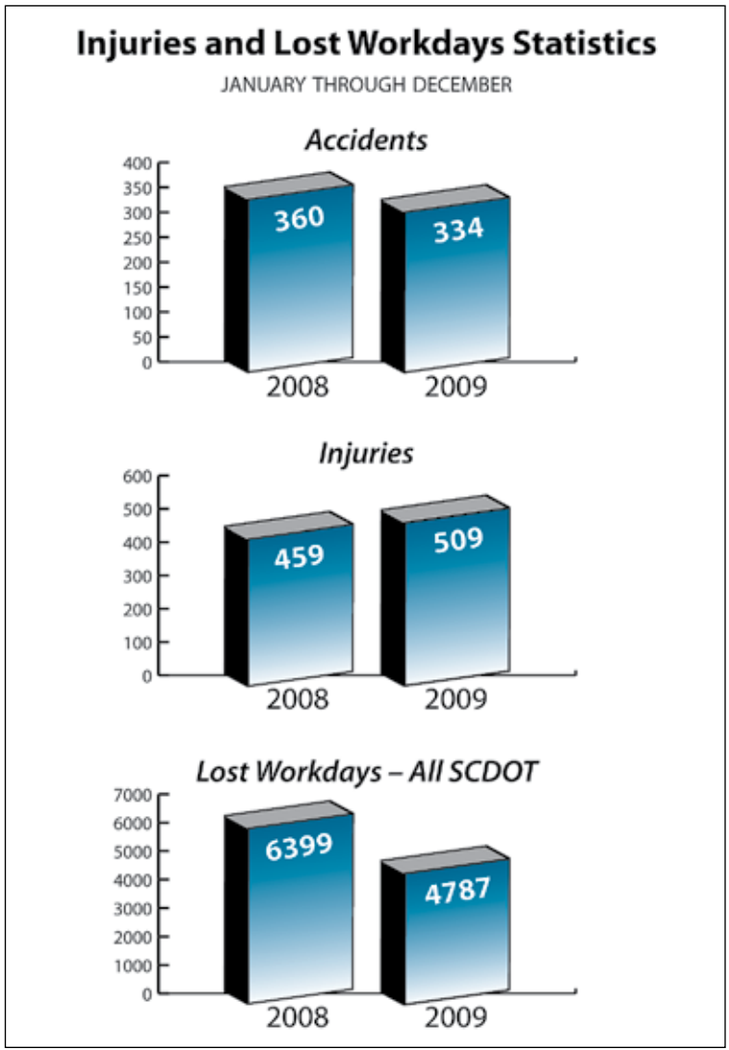
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