SCDOT, SCDPS promote National Work Zone Awareness Week

By Bob Kudelka

SCDOT joined the South Carolina Department of Public Safety (SCDPS), the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (SCPRT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other safety partners in observing National Work Zone Awareness Week, April 19-23, 2010.

This year marked the 11th anniversary of the National Work Zone Awareness Week campaign, created by American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA), FHWA and American State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Since then, the Associated General Contractors, the American Road and Transportation Builders and nearly every state DOT across the country have joined the cause and created various work zone safety awareness campaigns.

The safety partners adopted several goals and objectives for the campaign to include: (1) increase public awareness of the need for greater caution and care while driving through work zones; (2) reduce fatalities and injuries in work zones; and (3) increase public sector, industry and worker awareness of the value of training and best practices regarding work zone safety.

In South Carolina, Welcome Centers were adorned with work zone materials and employees will distribute brochures to help spread the work zone safety message to visitors. The State Highway Patrol had personnel available periodically to answer safety-related questions.

Transportation Secretary H.B. Limehouse Jr. said the need for work zone safety awareness is more critical in 2010.

"South Carolina has received enough stimulus funds to nearly double the number of federally-funded highway projects for this year, which means double the work zones. Drivers everywhere should be alert since SCDOT has work going on in every county of the state," said Limehouse.

The SC Highway Patrol and local law enforcement agencies continue to have a key role in work zone safety.

"This partnership has allowed our troopers to focus their resources in a proactive way and the results are clear," said SCDPS Director Mark Keel. "Since we began this partnership with SCDOT in 2006, we went from 15 work zone fatalities to two fatalities in 2009. We also have seen collisions and injuries in work zones cut in half."

Since 2006, SCDOT and the SCDPS have combined forces to reduce collisions, fatalities and injuries in South Carolina within highway construction, maintenance, and utility work zones and in corridors identified as high-risk for speed--related crashes. Under this contract, four Safety Improvement Teams (SIT) consisting of 24 experienced Highway Patrol Troopers were formed to devote full-time efforts to selective, concentrated and strict enforcement of the state's traffic laws in the Safety Improvement Zones identified by SCDOT.

The agreement between the two agencies has been a tremendous success. The number of injuries and collisions in and around work zones in South Carolina has decreased each year since the conception of the Safety Improvement Team. From June 2, 2006, thru May 31, 2009, these troopers have issued 122,804 citations.

Between 2005 and 2009, there were more than 4,000 traffic crashes in South Carolina that were work zone related. During this time, 42 people died in these crashes and an additional 1,755 were injured. The leading probable cause for work zone related crashes was driving too fast for conditions. The next four leading causes were: failure to yield right of way; driver inattention; following too closely; and improper lane change.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROB THOMPSON/THE CONNECTOR

Lance Corporal Bill Rhyne, right, discusses work zone safety with Claudia McCord of Johnson City, TN, at the I-26 Landrum Welcome Center on April 23. Displays were set up in South Carolina Welcome Centers across the state during National Work Zone Awareness Week to remind motorists to slow down and drive safely through work zones.

A South Carolina Highway Patrol Safety Improvement Team (SIT) officer is shown performing a traffic stop in a work zone in Lexington County. SIT officers concentrate on enforcing traffic laws in work zones.

The I-95 Welcome Center in Hardeeville won first place in a display competition between welcome centers across the state. Welcome Center employees in Hardeville are shown above, from left: Gwen Hendley, Corine Singleton, Carletter Williams and Heidi McManus. The Dillon Welcome Center on I-95 came in second place and the Fairplay Welcome Center on I-85 came in third place.