

Temporary Traffic Control for Tree Care Operations

by Dave Ross, Woodland TreeWorks, LLC

Our job often requires that we work on or near the street. The presence of moving traffic and pedestrians near our work zone increases the already high risk of injury. Specialized safety precautions can mitigate this risk and insure safety for both the crew and for passers by.

It is important that you understand what is required to comply with local traffic authorities. Compliance starts with contacting the local traffic authority and developing a traffic control plan. A traffic control plan will specify exactly what traffic control devices will be used and the proper placement of all such devices.

The requirements for temporary traffic control may vary somewhat depending upon who has jurisdiction on the road involved. In the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the US DOT Federal Highway Administration has set out standards to be used by road managers nationwide to install and maintain traffic control devices on all streets and highways. States are required to either adopt this manual or to develop their own, more restrictive standards. Connecticut is one of 20 states that have adopted the MUTCD with a state supplement. However, these standards apply only when working on state roads.

When you are working on local roads, the MUTCD, the standards of CT DOT or specific local rules may apply, depending upon what the local authority has determined.

Yes, this is all confusing. To work on a state road, the process is fairly straightforward. You must first obtain an Encroachment Permit. As a part of the application process for tree work, a CT DOT landscape designer will visit your worksite with you in advance of the job and determine where the right of way is and what traffic controls will need to be in place. The rest is filling out the paperwork and following the traffic control plan developed.

On a local road, you will need to become familiar with the local rules and regulations. If you are not familiar with what is required, you should make the effort to contact the local authority in each town. That is the best way to learn what is expected from you. These rules are not necessarily uniform across the state.

At the same time, it recommended that you become familiar with the details of the MUTCD as applies to temporary traffic control zones. These standards are the "state of the art" with respect to work zone safety. The MUTCD is available online: mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov.

According to the MUTCD, the following principles should be applied to temporary traffic control zones:

- A. Traffic movement should be disrupted as little as possible.
- B. Road users should be guided in a clear and positive manner while approaching and within construction, maintenance, and utility work areas.
- C. Routine inspection and maintenance of traffic control elements should be performed both day and night.
- D. Both the contracting agency and the contractor should assign at least one person on each project to have day-to-day responsibility for assuring that the traffic control elements are operating effectively and any needed operational changes are brought to the attention of their supervisors.

Other key points:

All work zones shall be ADA compliant.

A written and approved traffic control plan shall be on the worksite.

A Class II vest is required for daylight, a Class III vest for night.

Effective traffic control will:

* Warn * Inform * Guide * Regulate

All work zones are divided into 5 parts:

* Advance Warning Zone - includes at least 3 diamond-shaped signs providing Warning, Information and Actions To Be Taken

* Transition Zone - traffic is moved from the normal lane with a taper of channeling devices such as cones

* Buffer Zone - recovery area for errant vehicles - should be as large as possible and have no workers or equipment in it

* Work Space Zone - where the work takes place

* Termination Zone - taper back to the normal lane

Flaggers are required on a 2 lane road when one lane is closed and traffic must be alternated. In Connecticut, on state roads, flaggers must be certified by the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATTSA). On local roads, authorities may require the use of local police officers as flaggers.

Flaggers should be trained. They should also stay alert, face oncoming traffic, be highly visible and stay out of the path of oncoming vehicles.