

**Work Zone Fines Increased
to Protect Highway Workers**
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 25, 2008
PR# 08-049

Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Information Release



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When highway worker Larry Dunlap of Sayre went to work flagging traffic following a bridge hit in August 2007, he had no idea his life would change forever. But it did.

Dunlap was performing a job he had done frequently during his 23 years with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation: assisting motorists by flagging traffic. On August 31, 2007, he was working on SH-6 in Elk City, when an errant vehicle struck him, resulting in multiple surgeries and a struggle for his life.

Despite the fact that doctors told him he'd always have to walk with a walker or be confined to a wheel chair, he has proved them wrong. He is, literally, a walking success story and continues to improve with time. But he's one of the "fortunate" ones; work-zone accidents have, over the years, taken the lives of 53 ODOT workers – more deaths than at any other state agency – and injured many others.

Now, in Dunlap's honor, endangerment of the lives of highway workers within construction or maintenance zones soon will carry an increased penalty – in some cases as much as \$10,000.

House Bill 2474 was signed by Gov. Henry on Friday at the State Capitol. Lawmakers and members of ODOT, along with Dunlap and his wife, Melva, were present. The special signing draws attention to a new law set to take effect Nov. 1.

The law calls for a fine of up to \$1,000 for anyone caught speeding, failing to obey merge signs, failing to stop for work-zone flaggers, failing to obey traffic-control devices, driving in any area not designated for traffic in a construction zone or in any way altering traffic-control devices.

A \$5,000 fine may be invoked for endangering the lives of workers and resulting in an injury to a worker in a construction or maintenance zone, and up to \$10,000 in the event of a worker's death.

The law is intended to get drivers' attention and encourage them to slow down and stay alert in work zones.

"If (the law) gets just one person's attention, it will cause everyone else to slow down. That's all we can hope for," Dunlap said. "I hope it helps the (workers) out there."

The law also extends to city, county and contract workers in a work zone on any city, county or state road.

Current law addresses only speeding in work zones and is limited to a fine double the normal amount, not including court costs.

"Highways definitely are a dangerous place to work. We commend the governor and the legislature for recognizing the importance of having a law that contains more than just a fine for speeding," said ODOT Director Gary Ridley.

Authors of the bill include Rep. Purcy Walker, D-Elk City, and Sen. Tom Ivester, Elk City. Co-authors were Rep. Neil Brannon, D-Arkoma; Rep. Larry Glenn, D-Miami; Rep. Glen Bud Smithson, D-Sallisaw; Rep. Jeannie McDaniel, D-Tulsa; Rep. Wade Rousselot, D-Wagoner; and Rep. Ryan McMullen, D-Burns Flat, and Sen. Earl Garrison, D-Muskogee.

The bill passed unanimously in both the House and Senate.

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(Editors and News Directors: For more information call the ODOT Media & Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.)



Oklahoma highway equipment operator Larry Dunlap, Sayre, gives an emotional account of how injuries he incurred while flagging traffic changed his life and the lives of his family members. Dunlap was one of several who spoke to media and guests at the 2008 annual Work Zone Awareness Week press conference held in April at ODOT Headquarters in Oklahoma City. Dunlap, a 23-year veteran of ODOT, was struck by an errant vehicle in August 2007 while assisting traffic at SH-6 and I-40 in Elk City. Dunlap said doctors originally gave him only a 5-percent chance of survival. Gov. Brad Henry recently signed into law a bill calling for increased penalties for drivers who endanger the lives of highway workers.



Gov. Brad Henry, surrounded by a group of employees with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, signed HB2474, also known as the Larry Dunlap bill, into law Friday. The bill, authored by Rep. Percy Walker, D-Elk City, pictured far left, and Sen. Tom Ivester, D-Elk City, pictured far right, outlines stiffer penalties for motorists endangering the lives of highway workers in construction zones. Dunlap, a 23-year veteran highway worker for the ODOT, was seriously injured last year when struck by a vehicle in a work zone. The law takes effect Nov. 1.