

Standing Out on the Job

To the roadside assistance professional, being highly visible can mean the difference between life and death. The Federal Highway Administration reports that in 2001, more than 1,076 workers were killed and more than 20,000 were injured while working in highway zones. These numbers are not acceptable in any industry.

Those who respond to accidents or requests for breakdown assistance know the side of the road is a dangerous place to be even on a good day. Add the additional curve balls of poor nighttime visibility, treacherous weather, and crowded roadside conditions, and service providers can be real targets. Let's take a look at how you and your drivers can proactively play a role in managing time, space and visibility, and protect yourself accordingly.

According to Rich McNeely, a veteran safety expert and a spokesperson for AW Direct, "Motorists simply cannot see a towing operator who is dressed in a navy uniform moving around in the dark to hook up a vehicle. Towing operators think that because they can see the approaching headlights the motorist can see them but they are mistaken." (AW Direct is a towing accessories company and a AAA Preferred Supplier.)

As we prepare to head into fall's shorter days and increased chances for rain, sleet and snow, here are some tips that can be applied to tow providers everywhere:

First, consider your drivers. Tow bosses spend thousands of dollars on light bars and flashers to ensure their vehicles are seen, but what can you do to ensure your people are visible? Increasingly, roadside professionals from construction crewmembers to police officers are wearing coats, vests, gloves and even hats made with reflective materials. These attention-grabbing items have decreased work zone accidents as much as 67 percent according to the Federal Highway Administration. And national and



Reflective safety vests help towers to be more visible to passing motorists.

state governments are getting more involved, stepping up their efforts to mandate roadside visibility.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) considers low visibility a workplace hazard. They have a regulation that requires the use of high visibility safety apparel. The regulation basically requires that employees are provided and shall wear warning vests or other suitable garments marked with or made of reflectorized or high-visibility material. OSHA has levied stiff fines where this has been ignored and workers have been killed or injured as a result. For more information about OSHA, log onto <http://www.osha.gov>.

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) has gotten into the act, too. ANSI is a private, non-profit organization that provides guidance in the U.S. regarding voluntary standardization and conformity assessments. The ANSI-107 Standard, for example, is cited often in relation to reflective garments, and has led to the development of a whole range of products to meet the needs of workers in any situation. The use of ANSI-107 Class 2 compliant safety vests are currently the most commonly used and can increase the wearer's visibility in most situations. Some states are taking these standards and formulating them into law. Minnesota began requiring highway workers to use ANSI Class 2 compliant clothing in early 2002. Towers buying

safety garments need to read the standard and use it to determine their own high visibility needs. The site can be accessed online at: <http://www.ansi.org>. AW Direct's McNeely serves as a member of the ANSI-107 Standards Committee, and recommends that tow business owners should proactively seek to stay abreast of changing laws and regulations. Copies of the standard are available for purchase from the International Safety Equipment Association: www.safetysitequipment.org.

Next, train and regularly remind your staff to pay attention to their surroundings. Urge them to use all of their senses to stay in tune with potential dangers. It is critical for tow operators to assume that they are invisible at all times to motorists whizzing past them. Consider incentives to drivers with the top accident-free records. Prior to ordering reflective garments, seek the input of your drivers to ensure the garments have a greater chance of being worn once they leave the shop.

Flashing yellow lights, flares, and other high-visibility devices on the emergency road service vehicle are still important protective measures. Make sure they are checked regularly to ensure they are in good working order.

"Low-tech" devices such as a flashlight stocked in the cab of each service vehicle are cost-effective and enable the tow provider to see and to be seen. Additionally, reflective safety vests, gloves, rainwear, clip-on flashing lights, flares and strobes can heighten a service provider's visibility. Finally, in addition to the toll that accidents can take in human terms, there is also the financial cost. Don't risk heavy fines and increased insurance costs that can accrue as a result of owner ignorance or driver negligence. Seeing and being seen takes on a whole new meaning when there are lives at stake. 🚚

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