

On the cover



Upcoming changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation set to revise standards and better protect traffic control workers.

Street smarts: Raising efforts to reduce the risks for traffic control workers

By Helena Bryan

New Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requirements governing traffic control look to better protect workers.

Among the 150 or more traffic control companies in B.C., Andres Quality Construction Services in Terrace stands out as an innovator in traffic control and in protecting its roadside workers.

It's a big achievement for this small, 14-employee company. Keeping pace with best practices has prepared the company well to meet the revised standards set by upcoming Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requirements that govern this high-hazard sector.

A multitude of hazards

The list of challenges associated with working close to traffic is lengthy. From busy rush-hour volume and traffic coming from multiple directions into a limited space, blocked sightlines from hills or curves in the road, to working in all kinds of weather conditions and light levels, there are many ever-changing hazards that must be considered when working in traffic control.

Statistics speak volumes

The data demonstrates just how dangerous traffic control work can be. In 2020, 23 roadside workers who were struck by vehicles sustained injuries serious enough they had to miss time from work. From 2011 through 2020, 12 roadside workers were killed and 207 were injured.

Getting workers out of the line of traffic

Operations manager and certified traffic control instructor Donna Andres knows the risks first-hand. She was a traffic control person for almost a decade before starting the company in 2006. "The hazards have evolved," she says. "When I first started, I witnessed a driver reading a book and that stood out. Now, it's common for drivers to be distracted." Andres adds that the increased number of vehicles equates to more distracted drivers on the road, and "you can't depend on them to pay due attention or to maintain their vehicles properly."

Andres' on-the-road-experience is invaluable now that she's running her own company. Educating workers and hosting monthly safety meetings are just part the company's efforts to reduce the risks. "I want my

employees to arrive home safe every day; without them I don't have a business. The best way to protect them is to eliminate or reduce their exposure to vehicles, to get them off the road or further away from traffic."

That's why her company was one of the first in B.C. to purchase special automated traffic control equipment. Automated flagger assistance devices (AFADs) feature both flashing lights and a flagged gate-arm that extends into travel lanes, making them highly visible to road users. The AFADs are portable, easy to set up, and small enough to be used in areas where the road has narrow shoulders.

These devices are most often used in pairs, with one at each end of the work zone. Once the equipment is set up and synchronized, one person can operate both remotely. If the space between the devices is greater than 250 metres, or they are out of the line of sight of each other, two people, each with a remote, can be stationed to operate the AFAD from their end of the worksite.

Recent U.S. studies have shown that AFADs lower road users' approach speeds and encourage them to stop further back than if devices such as portable traffic lights are used.

WorkSafeBC is encouraging the use of AFADs as part of stepped-up efforts to make traffic control safer by eliminating worker exposure, especially in high-risk locations.

Changes to the Regulation

In collaboration with government and industry stakeholders, WorkSafeBC has strengthened sections of the Regulation governing traffic control to better protect workers. Prevention Field Services manager Morris Benetton says, "employers must strive to eliminate workers from being exposed to vehicular traffic, or use engineering controls to better protect workers. They must consider higher levels of risk control."

The Regulation amendments for traffic control, which come into effect on December 1, 2021, include three key components:

Carrying out a risk assessment to create a traffic control plan

Employers must consider a range of elements when carrying out a risk assessment, including work

Traffic control student checks the set up of the automated flagger assistance device (AFAD) during on-site training in Terrace.



duration, nature of the work, traffic volume, lines of sight, speed limits, visibility, and weather and/or road conditions.

Based on the assessment, employers are required to develop a written traffic control plan.

Applying control measures in order of effectiveness

Employers must, to the extent practicable, eliminate workers' exposure to traffic in a work zone. This could mean constructing detours or alternative routes. If elimination is not possible, employers must prevent or minimize workers' exposure to hazards through other controls, in the order of effectiveness. This includes engineering controls like barriers or traffic control devices, and administrative controls such as reducing the number of workers exposed to traffic or scheduling work in off-peak hours. Traffic control persons should only be used after other traffic control measures have been considered and determined to be insufficient to manage traffic.

Ensuring adequate supervision

Employer-designated, qualified supervisors must ensure that traffic control plans are implemented, traffic control persons have the relevant orientation and training before starting work, and work zones are inspected at intervals appropriate to the risks.

You can find details about the traffic control Regulation amendments on [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

Serious Injury Prevention Initiative focuses on traffic risks

To support the changes to the Regulation, WorkSafeBC's Serious Injury Prevention Initiative (SIPI) team will be focusing its prevention activities on traffic control and towing services as the amendments come into effect. SIPI was formed in 2015, with the goal of targeting prevention efforts in industries or sectors that have a greater potential for serious injury or work-related death.

Moving vehicles — because of their mass and velocity — present an inherent risk of serious injury. This risk can be further amplified if there is a lack of effective management controls, including planning and supervision elements.

Inspections will be just one part of the 2022 SIPI prevention strategy. “We will be engaging with employers to support solutions that align with the updated Regulation, with a focus on reducing serious injuries resulting from being struck by a vehicle,” Benetton notes.

WorkSafeBC will focus on educating stakeholders about the changes, including requirements for conducting risk assessments and strengthening risk controls. Monitoring employers and providing additional supports as necessary will also be part of the strategy.

“With more effective controls and supervision in place, employers and workers can eliminate or significantly lower the risk of serious injury in this sector,” says Benetton.

From the employer perspective, Andres is supportive of the changes. “It’s great to see these steps being taken and it will mean safer worksites for traffic control persons.” 🧐



A WorkSafeBC Prevention officer and Andres Quality Construction Services Operations manager, Donna Andres review the traffic control plan for the worksite.



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