WEEK 36 SEPTEMBER, BACK-TO-SCHOOL TRAFFIC · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

Work Zone & Traffic Control

School's back in and the roads are full of rushing parents, buses, and drivers looking at phones. To a worker on the road edge, a moment of somebody else's inattention is the whole risk. Two things protect you: being seen, and not being where the machine is going.

The hazard

Live traffic beside a work zone is one of the worst hazards on any road job — drivers speed, drift, and blow through cones. But the equipment inside your own zone is just as dangerous, and reversing is where most of that harm happens. Ontario doesn't treat reversing as something to manage carefully; it requires the project to be **planned and organized so equipment isn't reversed, or is reversed as little as possible**, and prohibits reversing where there's a practical alternative.

Be seen — the garment is specified, not left to you

This is the part most sites get wrong. Ontario doesn't say "wear a Class 2 vest." It describes the garment itself, and a worker who may be endangered by vehicular traffic has to wear one covering at least the upper body with **all** of this:

- **Fluorescent blaze or international orange** as the colour. **A fluorescent yellow-green vest — the most common one on any site — does not meet that**, whatever its CSA class.
- **Two yellow stripes, 5 cm wide**, front and back: at least 500 cm² of yellow on the front, 570 cm² on the back.
- **Front stripes vertical and centred**, roughly 225 mm apart centre to centre; **back stripes in a diagonal X**.
- Stripes that are **both retro-reflective and fluorescent**.
- A vest needs **adjustable fit**; a nylon vest also needs a **side and front tear-away**.

At night that isn't enough on its own: you also need retro-reflective silver stripes **encircling each arm and leg**, or equivalent side-visibility stripes of at least 50 cm² per side. From the side, a plain vest is close to invisible.

Pull a vest out of the truck and check it against that list — colour first.

Don't be where the machine is going

- **Plan the reverse out of the job.** Drive-through routes, turnarounds, loading positions that don't need backing. That's the primary control, decided before the shift rather than at the machine.
- **A signaller is required** where the operator's view of the intended path is obstructed, **or** where anyone could be endangered by the machine or its load — and that includes excavators, backhoes, cranes and similar equipment.
- **The signaller does that and nothing else.** A competent worker, no second task, in the signaller's garment, positioned **clear of the intended path** with a **clear view of it**, watching the part of the path the operator can't see. Operator and signaller agree their procedure before anything moves, and both follow it. The employer has to give the signaller proper training and written instructions in a language they understand, and keep those instructions on the project.

- **Eye contact is not permission.** A look from the cab tells you they saw you a second ago. Before you approach, get a **positive acknowledgement** — an agreed signal back — and have the machine stopped and secured the way the procedure requires.
- **Don't count on hearing an alarm.** In Ontario the reversing alarm is required on **dump trucks**; anything else on your site has one only because the maker fitted it. Never step behind a machine assuming it would beep at you.
- Set signs, cones, and barriers per the traffic protection plan, keep a real buffer between you and live lanes, and re-walk the layout through the day.

Watch out for

- A yellow-green vest being treated as compliant near traffic.
- Faded, dirty, or torn hi-vis — drivers can't dodge what they can't pick out.
- Cones and barriers that drift out of line through the day and quietly shrink the buffer.
- A signaller who's also carrying material, holding a phone, or standing in the travel path.

Talk it over

- Pull a vest out of the truck: what colour is it, and does it match what Ontario actually specifies?
- Where is equipment still reversing on this site, and what would it take to plan that out?
- Who's signalling in the tight spots today, do they have anything else assigned, and what's the agreed signal to approach?

A SIGNATURE PROVES ATTENDANCE. DASHPOT PROVES UNDERSTANDING.

Get a new toolbox talk every week — free.

Dashpot Safety turns the morning talk into a per-worker record of what each crew member actually understood, by SMS in about five minutes.

SCAN FOR THE FULL LIBRARY →
DASHPOTSAFETY.COM/TOOLBOX-TALKS

This toolbox talk is general safety information for Ontario construction — not legal advice, and not a substitute for your own site-specific hazard assessment, worker training, and health-and-safety program. Follow the current Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations, manufacturer instructions, and your employer's procedures. Provided as-is, without warranty — you use it at your own risk.