

Road-work area crashes most apt to kill motorists

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WASHINGTON — Highway construction-zone crashes are killing more people, and it's most likely drivers and passengers rather than road workers who die, according to a coalition that's urging motorists to slow down in work zones.

Eighty percent of the 1,079 people killed in construction-zone crashes in 2001 were drivers or passengers, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials said Tuesday. Work-zone crashes killed 150 road workers and injured 40,000 workers, drivers and passengers.

Highway safety groups were setting up 1,079 orange highway cones in downtown Washington on Tuesday to commemorate National Work Zone Awareness Week.

John Horley, the executive director of the transportation officials group, said many drivers assume construction workers are the ones who die or get hurt in work-zone . . . He hopes the

statistic will persuade drivers to pay more attention and slow down when road work is being done.

"You've got a dog in this fight, folks," Horley said, according to remarks prepared before Tuesday's event. "Start driving as if you know it, because staying alive is not guaranteed."

Construction-zone crash fatalities are on the rise, according to data from the Transportation Department. There were 1,026 deaths in 2000 and 872 in 1999. The 2001 level is a 55 percent increase from the 1997 level of 693, according to Federal Highway Administrator Mary Peters.

Peters said rear-end crashes are the most common type of work-zone crash, and drivers make up the highest percent of fatalities.

Peters said she supports total road closure in work zones whenever appropriate. She also promotes the use of long-lasting pavement to decrease the need for repairs and encourages states to let motorists know where work zones are so they can avoid them.