

Enhanced Emergency Zone Law Will Help Protect Emergency Workers

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Starting January 1, 2011, law enforcement will have an additional tool to help protect fellow emergency workers safe while working on sides of the highway.

The state's enhanced Emergency Zone law (RCW 46.61.212) builds on an earlier "move over" law and creates zones around emergency workers similar to construction zones. Under the new law, the fine will double if you're speeding or fail to move over when passing through the emergency zone.

"The State Patrol is not the only organization struggling with this problem. The towing industry recently experienced the tragedy of having one of its drivers killed while working on the side of the road," said John R. Batiste, Chief of the Washington State Patrol. "Complying with this new law couldn't be easier. Slow down and move over when approaching emergency workers on the side of the road."

Driving behavior that endangers an emergency worker becomes a crime. The motorist could be charged with a gross misdemeanor with possible jail time and a mandatory sixty day license suspension.

"It is important for drivers slow down and move over when they see emergency crews working on the freeway; it is not just for the driver's safety but for our crew's safety," said Warren A. Merritt, Deputy Chief Bellevue Fire Department and Washington Fire Chiefs. "Awareness of this new law will help motorists and emergency workers stay safe."

Washington State passed the original "Move Over" law in 2007. However despite this change, the problem continued to get worse. Between 2006 and 2009, the Washington State Patrol alone had 80 collisions involving passing vehicles striking trooper vehicles parked alongside the highway. The major contributing factor in these collisions were speeding or driving too fast for conditions, followed by DUI.

The new law also requires State Patrol to conduct an education period for the first 90 days. During this time, troopers will focus on educating drivers about this new law and the need to slow down and move over when they approach and pass through emergency zones.

Go online to view see more information about the Emergency Zone Law at www.youtube.com/wspgovandmedia.