

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

## Mobile barriers: Helping to save lives

By Tamara Greenwell

Can you imagine what it would feel like to be in the path of an out of control vehicle, barreling straight at you at freeway speeds? The horrific sound of metal on metal as the vehicle crashes just feet away?

This actually played out at one of our work zones on Interstate 5 near Woodland shortly after midnight on Saturday, Aug. 6. Thankfully no one was hurt when an out-of-control vehicle crashed into a mobile barrier and not the crew replacing concrete panels on the highway. The driver was arrested and charged with 32 counts of reckless endangerment, one charge for each person working on the highway that night, and DUI.

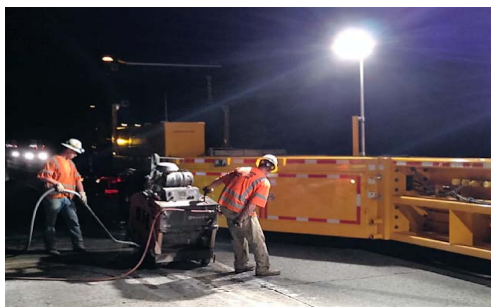
Unfortunately, work-zone collisions are not uncommon and always present a challenge for keeping our crews safe. But we're hoping a new tool will help.

What's a mobile barrier?

A mobile barrier is a new tool we're testing to create a safer separation between traffic and our work zones. Each unit is a big steel wall connected to a truck trailer that can be parked or pulled along the highway while road work is being done. I don't know about you, but I'd rather work behind a metal wall than a plastic cone when up against traffic going 60 mph.



Damaged tire on the vehicle of a suspect in a work zone collision.



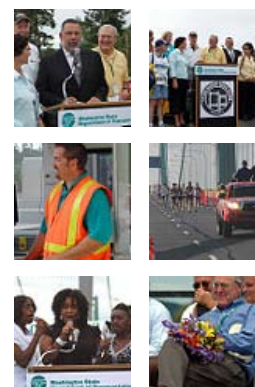
Construction workers on I-5 working behind a mobile barrier.



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A mobile barrier helps keep our workers safely separated from traffic.

I mean, look at the crew in the photo above, they are kneeling on the roadway, less than 20 feet from interstate traffic! While mobile barriers are designed to create a safer work zone, they have an added benefit of reducing the amount of time workers are on the highway, and the time traffic is delayed by construction.

Mobile barriers have many benefits, but they also have some limitations. They are expensive. The cost of metal is much higher than the cost of traffic cones. The barriers are large, like a semi-truck, which can be a challenge when working on the highway. Maneuvering them around live traffic and small work areas means they're not always the right tool for the job.

When you think about it, each one of those workers has a family who expects them to come home at the end of the shift - you can't put a price on that. It seems the money spent for the mobile barrier was worth every penny. While it may not make sense for every roadway project, we're now looking at ways to use mobile barriers on more of our construction and maintenance jobs around the state.



Replacing concrete panels on I-5 near Woodland is tough work, and keeping them safe is our top priority.

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Excellent vision, engineering. Keep on doing what you're doing!

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