

Leadership in Work Zone & Aerial Protection



The Standard Set by Leaders

Work zone safety starts with leadership. Roadway work exposes crews and the public to high-consequence struck-by hazards, rapidly changing field conditions, and distracted drivers. The public highway system can be one of the most dangerous work environments in the country, making effective traffic control essential before any work begins.

In our industry, a critical hazard occurs when crews think two-dimensionally and lose track of their boom or bucket position above active traffic lanes. Each year, booms are struck by tall vehicles passing through work zones, resulting in catastrophic equipment damage and placing workers aloft in life-threatening situations. Leaders set the standard by ensuring that work zone and overhead protection are planned, understood, visible, and enforced.

Before Work Starts: Planning and Hazard Elimination

Leaders must establish the safety framework before a single piece of equipment moves:

- **Engage Vendors Early:** Partner with traffic control vendors ahead of time to ensure proper resources and devices are provided.
- **Require a Formal Plan:** Never treat traffic control as an afterthought. Require a specific traffic control plan for all roadway, roadside, and public access work.
- **Verify Compliance:** Confirm that the work setup complies with all company, federal, state, local, customer, and permitting requirements.
- **Eliminate the Hazard:** The most effective defense is to keep the space above active travel lanes completely clear. Reposition the truck or adjust the boom angle relative to the roadway to keep equipment out of the line of fire.
- **Brief the Crew:** Ensure the team includes specific traffic hazards, vertical clearance limits, and overhead boom positions in their pre-job briefings.
- **Enforce Fall Protection:** Verify that every worker wears a harness and connects their lanyard every single time they work aloft in a bucket, without exception.

While Work is Underway: Operational Command

Safety requires continuous oversight and active coordination while the job is active:

- **Maintain the Work Zone:** Inspect signs, cones, flagger stations, and warning devices regularly to ensure they remain clear, correct, effective, and in good condition. The setup must send a unmistakable message to on-coming drivers.
- **Coordinate with Flaggers:** Ensure police details and flaggers know exactly what your crew needs. Verify they have an unobstructed vantage point to see oncoming traffic and effectively halt vehicles.
- **Establish an Emergency Plan:** Confirm there is a definitive communication plan to instantly alert the crew aloft if a vehicle fails to stop or breaches the work zone.
- **Protect the Public:** Maintain awareness of the entire environment. Protect pedestrians and the public just as aggressively as you protect the crew.

Leadership Expectation: Stop Work Authority

Do not treat traffic exposure as routine. Plan it, permit it, brief it, verify it, and correct it before someone gets hurt. Safety control is non-negotiable. If a traffic control company is not executing the plan correctly, or if controls are missing, unclear, or no longer adequate for field conditions, **DON'T TAKE A CHANCE**. Strong leaders exercise absolute authority to stop and correct the job immediately. Pause operations, secure the area, and communicate with management to fix the hazard. Strong leaders make work zone protection visible, intentional, and non-negotiable on every job.