



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY  
GOVERNOR

September 27, 2001

MEMORANDUM

TO: Secretary Lyndo Tippet

FROM: J. D. Goins, P.E.  
Chief Engineer-Operations

SUBJECT: Traffic Control for Mowing Operations

Following the recent fatal accident in Division 10 involving a DOT tractor, you requested our office to provide you with a report on the procedures and practices in place for mowing highways with median guardrail.

The department has been installing guardrail in the medians of four lane highways for the last four years in an effort to reduce cross-median crashes. Early on in this program it became apparent that these guardrail installations would create new challenges for our maintenance operations with respect to mowing, turf management, and repair of damaged sections. To that end, a decision was made to establish the median turf of low growing grasses such as centipede where feasible to reduce the number of mowing cycles and to reduce the operators exposure to traffic. Additionally, a special provision has been included in our mowing contracts since the 1999 mowing season requiring traffic control devices to be utilized when median mowing operations encroach onto an adjacent travel way. A canvass of our district engineers found that in most cases either the contractors are utilizing smaller mowers, or traffic control is being provided for the protection of the mower operator where there is not sufficient space to mow between the guardrail and the edge of pavement.

As you may recall, back in 1997 new traffic control procedures were developed and implemented for slow moving operations such as painting and spraying following two deadly accidents that occurred on I-95. These procedures went beyond existing national standards and have resulted in much safer operations for DOT employees, our contractors, and the travelling public. Since that time we have also continued to evaluate other operations to determine if new procedures or enhancements are appropriate. Should the investigation of the recent tragedy in Division 10 indicate that procedural changes are in order, we will certainly take appropriate action. Safety will continue to be at the forefront of every operation undertaken by our department.

Secretary Lyndo Tippet

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By copy of this correspondence, I am asking each Division Engineer to review their mowing and other slow moving operations to ensure that they are in compliance with established procedures and standards. We will also be discussing this issue further at upcoming staff meetings.

If I can provide any additional information, please let me know.

CC: Mr. L. A. Sanderson, P.E.  
Mr. D. A. Allsbrook, Jr., P.E.  
Mr. W. S. Varnedoe, P.E.  
Mr. Roberto Canales, P.E.  
Mr. Robert Andrews  
✓ Mr. Ken Ivey, P.E.  
Division Engineers