



Move Over for Roadside Crews

Not only is it the polite thing to do, it is the law

By Paul Wesslund

Hood River Electric Cooperative lineworkers warn motorists of their presence near the roadway.
PHOTO BY LIBBY CALNON

Every year, workers along the sides of roads are injured or killed when cars crash into the crews' site, even though they are marked with bright cones and warning signs.

An easy way for drivers to reduce incidents that harm police officers and other first responders, road construction workers and utility crews is to remember a slogan—actually, a law—“Slow down or move over.”

It is good advice and a decent thing to do. It is also a requirement in all 50 states.

Legislatures first passed Move Over laws 25 years ago to

reduce the year-after-year harm to roadside emergency workers. In the past five years, states have added electric and other utility projects to their Move Over or Slow Down laws.

Electric utilities were part of the effort to expand the law to protect the safety of line crews.

There are slight differences in each state's Move Over laws, but not so much you can't figure out the right thing to do, even when traveling from state to state. Here are the basic requirements:

- Within 200 feet before and after a work zone marked

with bright signs and marker cones, and often flashing lights, change lanes if there is more than one lane on your side of the road so there is an empty lane between your vehicle and the roadside crew.

- If it is not possible or safe to change lanes, slow down. Many states specify slowing down 20 mph below the posted speed limit if it is 25 mph or more—so 5 mph if the posted speed limit is 25 mph.

- Drivers must obey all traffic directions posted as part of the worksite.

- Keep control of your car.



This basic driving rule is listed in many Move Over laws. The requirement to slow down offers general guidance rather than specifying a speed. It means you must pay attention and respond to weather conditions. Heavy rain or a slick road might mean you need to slow down more than 20 mph.

Penalties for violating the Move Over requirements range from \$100 to \$2,000, or loss of your driver's license.

Electric utility crews warrant special attention. A roadside construction project might close a lane for days or weeks, giving people familiar with the area time to anticipate the changed traffic pattern.

A study of utility worksite accidents found the temporary nature of power line repairs could surprise motorists.

Because utility work can start and finish in a few hours, it raises risks with drivers who think they know the road ahead. Another risk is when worksites are being put up or taken down. Roadside accidents can happen as crews are setting up signs and traffic cones.

Don't drive distracted. Drive according to the conditions of the road. Be courteous to roadside work crews. Watch the signs and obey them. Follow the laws.

It is good advice that could save a life. ■

ALASKA

Drivers approaching stationary emergency vehicles that are displaying flashing lights—including tow trucks—traveling in the same direction, must vacate the lane closest if safe and possible to do so, or slow to a speed reasonable and prudent for traffic, road and weather conditions. This applies to road maintenance and animal control vehicles.

ARIZONA

Drivers must reduce speed and, if safe to do so, vacate the lane closest to any stationary vehicles with flashing or warning lights, including emergency vehicles and tow trucks.

CALIFORNIA

Drivers must slow down and vacate the lane closest to a stationary emergency response vehicle flashing emergency lights, if safe to do so. This applies to tow trucks and Caltrans vehicles, if displaying flashing amber warning lights, and waste service vehicles.

IDAHO

Drivers traveling in the same direction must slow below the posted speed limit and vacate the lane closest to a stationary emergency vehicle displaying flashing lights, if safe to do so. This applies to tow trucks, wreckers, other recovery vehicles and municipal vehicles.

MONTANA

Drivers approaching a stationary emergency vehicle displaying flashing lights, including towing and recovery vehicles, traveling in the same direction, must vacate the lane closest, if safe and possible to do so, or slow to a safe speed. If on a highway with a speed limit 50 mph or greater, the driver must slow by at least 20 mph below the posted speed limit.

NEVADA

Drivers traveling in the same direction must reduce speed below the posted speed limit and, if safe and possible to do so, vacate the lane closest to stationary emergency vehicles and tow vehicles displaying flashing lights.

NEW MEXICO

Drivers approaching a stationary emergency vehicle or a recovery or repair vehicle, including tow trucks, must slow down and vacate the lane next to the stopped vehicle, if they are able. If drivers are not able to move over, they are required to slow down and be prepared to stop.

OREGON

Drivers approaching any stationary vehicle displaying warning or flashing lights, including roadside assistance and tow vehicles, traveling in the same direction, must vacate the lane closest if safe and possible to do so, or to reduce speed to at least 5 mph under the posted speed limit.

UTAH

Drivers approaching a stationary authorized emergency vehicle, tow truck or highway maintenance vehicle displaying flashing lights, and traveling in the same direction, must reduce speed and, if safe to do so, vacate the lane closest to stationary vehicles.

WASHINGTON

Drivers must vacate the lane closest to stationary emergency vehicles, including tow trucks, if traveling in the same direction and it is safe to do so. If not, drivers must reduce speed to at least 10 mph below the posted speed limit. This applies to stationary or slow-moving municipal, utility and road maintenance vehicles.

For other states, visit <https://drivinglaws.aaa.com/tag/move-over-law>.