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Safety begins at the very start of the day with stretching exercises and safety tips.

Good Safety Practices Rule of the Day at I-405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project

By Rich Morallo

Community Relations / Volunteer Coordinator

(May 4, 2010) The phrase "Don't Tread on Me" and the image of a coiled rattlesnake have much more than solely political overtones in the scrub and brush covered hillsides of Southern California.

The warning is literal and when a slight movement in the bush on the hillside overlooking the I-405 Freeway caught Rich Hanzel's eye, he immediately focused his attention on what could have had the potential of becoming a life-altering experience.

He didn't have to wait long. Within seconds, a dark colored Western Rattlesnake glided silently out from under the thick scrub brush on the hillside below the Getty Center.

Stepping back to a safe distance, Hanzel, a survey crew member working on the I-405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project, stepped back a safe distance, took a quick photograph of the snake and reported the incident.

A Western
Rattlesnake
checks out



the ruckus going on alongside the I-405 as survey crew member Rich Hanzel snapped the photo of this hillside resident.

Safety first

No stranger to the area, one of the first recorded instances of a run-in with this particular species of rattlesnake can be found in the journals of the fabled explorers Lewis and Clark, who wound their way from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean in the early 1800s.

On their return journey, they wrote, "...we have encountered a VERY poisonous snake. It is known as the Western Rattlesnake, it has a rattle on the tail used when it is about to attack. The size can differ greatly anywhere from 1.3 feet to 5.3 feet. The very adaptable climate makes it easy for these critters to climb into equipment and enjoy the ride."

Letting these – and other "critters" such as coyotes, raccoons, skunks, bees – "climb into equipment" and "enjoy the ride" wasn't exactly the lesson learned by Hanzel and the other Kiewit Pacific Company survey crew members in a series of safety meetings presented by Kiewit Senior Safety Manager Robert Hume.

"We covered this in our next few safety meetings," said Hume, a safety professional with 14 years experience, who also keeps all field workers in the area briefed about potential hazard at the weekly progress meeting with both Metro and Caltrans staff. Both agencies are client partners in the four-year highway project.

"Hanzel and the other survey crews working in the tall grass were briefed on safety beforehand, wore protective snake chap leggings and followed the right safety practices," said Hume.

Correct safety practices are vital and planned for on this project to add a northbound high occupancy vehicle lane to the San Diego Freeway (I-405) between the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10) and the Ventura Freeway (U.S. 101), according to Metro Construction Safety Manager Ralph Sbragia.

Safety "is first on this \$1.034 billion project," which includes removing and replacing three major bridges, widening 13 bridges which span the Interstate and LA City streets, and reconstructing 25 ramps, he said.

"Kiewit has three high and aggressive safety goals – zero recordable injuries, zero at fault vehicle collisions and zero public/private property damage incidents," said Sbragia. "Zero recordable injuries means they intend to prevent any injury requiring more than first aid treatment during both the design and construction phases of the project."



Work crews are motivated and trained to follow good safety practices.

Plans in place

A safety professional with a 30-year safety and health sciences resume, Sbragia said that plans have been developed to create and maintain a safe work environment while crews work night and day with heavy equipment, demolish and rebuild bridges and work on widening the freeway, all while minimizing the flow of traffic on one of the Southland's busiest – and most important – freeways.

"Every work assignment has a job hazard analysis done so workers will be aware of the proper way to handle equipment, the appropriate safety gear to wear and what are potential dangers," said Sbragia, who has also briefed visitors on proper protocol and field attire.

"We protect ourselves from the hazards of a construction site by wearing the right work clothing, proper work boots and ANSI approved hard hat, safety eyewear, gloves and traffic vest," he said.

According to Kiewit's Robert Hume, work crews will be motivated and trained to follow good safety practices.

"Safety begins at the very start of the day when we all do stretching exercises and talk about safety to ready ourselves for the day's work," he said. "Working safely means we are staying safe not only for ourselves but for the project, our teammates and our loved ones. We all want to go home at the end of the day in the same shape we started the day."