



Above: More and more, construction crews are using these big orange construction barrels to mark the edges of lanes in work zones. Before, these barrels may look big and heavy, but they are hollow, and made of this plastic. The only thing that holds them in position is a weight on the bottom, usually a heavy rubber ring.



If the barrels are placed on the other side of the concrete divider, a blow-over barrel is very unlikely to bounce over the divider or roll into your path. But if the barrels are placed between the concrete and your lane, then a blow-over barrel is very likely to end up in the lane.

The worst case scenario is a line of barrels dividing opposing traffic. An oncoming truck can easily strike a barrel, and even if the truck doesn't hit it, an higher speeds the wind-blown can push the barrel across or even tipple it over. If you see approaching a line of barrels positioned between lanes, your internal warning alert should go off. And if there is a large truck approaching rapidly in the opposing lane, that's potentially a lethal situation.

A barrel on its side is hazardous, because just a gust of wind can start it rolling. And an upright barrel without a black weight on the bottom is equally hazardous. Some construction crews add a second ring weight to barrels in precarious positions. When you



Barrels positioned on a cantared shoulder are not much of a hazard to motorcyclists, since a loose barrel will most likely roll down-hill, away from the traffic lane.



Barrels placed between a concrete divider and the traffic lane are much more of a hazard, since a blow-over barrel is very likely to end up rolling into the lane.

spot one of these dangerous situations, you should immediately move farther away, preferably into the next lane.

EDGE TRAPS

Although we don't know of any statistics to prove it, edge traps may be the most hazardous work zone hazard. An edge trap is any raised pavement edge or groove running parallel to the lane direction. For instance, when a lane is repaved, the edge of the new paving is raised several inches higher than the old paving. This raised edge can be out in the traffic lane. If you allow your front tire to nose up to a raised edge, it's very likely you will lose control and go down. We call it an "edge trap" because it tends to capture your front tire and trap you into a fall. Chose your tire is trapped by the raised edge, it's almost impossible to avoid a spill.

Almost all construction zones will have edge traps. The most common ones are where lanes are being repaved. Even prior



A barrel on its side is very hazardous, because just a gust of wind can start it rolling right into your path.



Barrels positioned between lanes are potentially a lethal hazard, especially if there's a large truck passing by on the other side.

to the repaving, edge traps can be created when the old asphalt paving is ground away. Raised edges are created on the sides of the gravel-away areas. Some edge traps aren't obvious as a gravel-away or repaired lane. It's common to spread gravel next to paving to fill in a section being repaired and below the height of the raised edge. But loose gravel several inches deep next to a hard pavement edge doesn't prevent a motorcycle from falling. Narrow motorcycle tires tend to pile through gravel and be captured by the edge of the pavement.

LOOSE GRAVEL

Loose gravel seems to be a common hazard for motorcycles, if the complete takes are any indication. Some roads aren't important enough to be repaired, but are still in line for sealing the surface to exclude water. A common technique, sometimes known as "sand coating," is to spray sticky tar over the surface, and then spread loose gravel over the tar to seal the cracks and



Here's a very hazardous situation, where the raised pavement edge widens out into the traffic lane.

create a fresh surface. It's up to traffic to squeeze the gravel into the tar and push the extra gravel to the sides. Eventually, the road department may send out a sweeper to clean off the extra gravel, but meanwhile it's a hazard to passing motorcyclists.

The sticky black tar is a nuisance, but the loose gravel can be hazardous. The gravel is dumped directly on the tar from trucks, and it's not easy to regulate the depth of the gravel with the truck in reverse. There may be a thin coating of gravel on the straight-away, followed by two inches of loose gravel in the corner.

FOLLOWING TRAFFIC

As the accident reports point out, it may not be the barrel or edge trap or loose gravel that got you off, but following traffic that can't avoid you after the fall. Officer Al is correct. In motorcycling, "There's no room for error."

It's very common for drivers to zoom into dangerous situations without slowing down, and that includes motorcyclists. When traffic suddenly comes to a stop, some drivers aren't prepared. If you have a question in the middle of a work zone, you need maneuvering room. And for a motorcyclist, surface hazards such as wet clay, loose gravel or edge traps make quick stops or swerves all the more difficult.

And remember that heavier loads require greater stopping distances. If you're carrying a big load of gear, a passenger, or towing a heavily loaded trailer, you need to increase your following distance.

It's important to back-off, but it's equally important to choose who you want behind you before you get into a work zone and



It's not always obvious that the pavement has been ground away, but that right lane is narrower than the center lane, creating a narrow edge trap.



Warning signs such as "Motorcyclists Don't Change Lanes" are a time-jerk reaction to a motorcycle accident where a rider has crashed attempting to ease over an edge trap.

need to start dodging hazards. When you see diamond-shaped orange signs ahead, or a white sign's behind you. If you have one or more aggressive drivers on your tail, it would be wise to shake them immediately. It's also important to look far ahead and spot where the construction is being done. Your priorities are different in a work zone than on a fully operational highway. In a work zone, space around you is most important than creating speed.

READING THE SIGNS

When you hear of some motorcyclist who dodges around a warning sign, or rides through a closed area in the middle of the night, a resulting accident shouldn't be a surprise. The "middle of the night" part also reminds us that about half of motorcycle fatalities involve a rider who has been drinking. To avoid getting seriously stranded in work zones, you need to see your wits.

When you see a sign such as "Motor-



The economy method of fixing a cracked road is to spray sticky tar on the surface and cover it with loose gravel. The gravel is obvious while the crew is working, but not so apparent after they pack up all the signs and go home.



Sometimes you need to "read between the lines" to figure out what the signs mean. "Bump" usually means a hole-jerk reaction to a motorcycle accident where a rider has crashed attempting to ease over an edge trap. The work crew may not understand exactly why some riders crash, but to help avoid liability they erect a general sign, such as "Bump," or "Motorcycles Use Extreme Caution."

You should trust all construction signs as an early warning of loose barrels and surface hazards, but you must also "read between the lines." For instance, you might need to ignore a "BUMP" sign, thinking the bump runs straight across the road. But look before you leap. The pavement edge may run across the lane at an angle, creating a severe edge trap hazard.

There are many more construction zone hazards awaiting you on the road, including slick steel plates, slippery clay, potholes, and heavy equipment craning into your path. But now that we've got you thinking about work zones, we know you'll be observing them more carefully. ●