



1/9/06- Harrison County

Construction Begins On Interstate Median Barriers To Save Lives



Along interstates in East Texas, drivers have to worry about not only those cars in front and behind, but even those heading the other way.

Many people have died just in the past few years after their vehicles crossed the medians and hit oncoming traffic. TxDOT hopes that will come to an end. The work is beginning rather quietly amid the rumble of the road.

Steve Juneau is Marshall Area Engineer for TxDOT.

"There have been a lot of accidents that have been caused by vehicles crossing the medians, and generally it's always a fatality when that happens," he said.

Along much of I-20 and Interstate 30, there has been no effective barrier. But that is changing.

"Everywhere we have a narrow median, we'll try to put [barriers] up," said Juneau.

The cables that make up one type of new median barrier might not look all that strong, but they proved their worth over in the Fort Worth area during the recent ice storms. Twenty-eight vehicles tried to go through the cables and they held every time.

Starting in Harrison County, cables will run along every stretch of I-20 where vehicles can cross, and along parts of U.S. 59 north and south of Marshall.

Construction's also underway from Mount Pleasant to Texarkana along I-30.

TxDOT has made the decision in Van Zandt, Smith, and Gregg Counties to use time-tested concrete barriers. They're more expensive, but TxDOT says better suited to the slope and condition of the highway medians. What's important is that it works, with a total cost of all projects at possibly more than \$25 million dollars.

"That's what our benefit will be -- it will save lives," Juneau said.

It could take two to three years before all the cable barriers are up in Northeast Texas. But TxDOT says the concrete barriers in Van Zandt, Smith, and Gregg Counties will be done sooner with all of them in by the end of the year.

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