

Road Work – Traffic Control Person Fact Sheet



WHAT IS A TRAFFIC CONTROL PERSON?

A traffic control person may also be known as a flag person (flag woman/flag man) or signaller. The main role is to:

- Stop, slow, and safely direct traffic through work or construction sites.
- Protect workers in the construction zone by regulating traffic flow.
- Give traffic control directions and signals clearly and precisely so that motorists understand their meaning.

Keep the flow of traffic moving with as few delays as possible.

Only use traffic control persons when other methods of traffic control are not adequate. Always use barriers, barricades, lane control devices, traffic signal lights, sign trucks, and other methods as appropriate instead of, and/or in addition to, traffic control persons to ensure the safety of all workers.

Is training required by occupational health and safety laws?

Yes. Most Canadian jurisdictions require that a person who is controlling traffic have training, complete a certificate, or be considered competent (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon). Nova Scotia and the Canadian Federal jurisdiction's occupational health and safety laws do not directly address training requirements for a traffic control person.

Each jurisdiction has specific requirements, for example, Ontario specifies that each traffic control person receive adequate oral and written instruction from the employer in a language the worker understands before performing traffic control duties. Northwest Territories requires that the employer ensure the designated signaller be trained to carry out his or her duties to ensure the signaller's safety and the safety of other workers.

This fact sheet does not cover all of the education or training required for a traffic control person. Always confirm any requirements with your local jurisdiction.

What should a traffic control person know before each job?

Before starting each job, know:

- The overall traffic protection plan and layout of the traffic control zone.
- Your duties, role and responsibilities.

- That you have the right training for this job, and that you understand your duties.
- What activities will be done on the work or construction site (e.g., paving, grading, etc.).
- What equipment is present and how the equipment will be operated (e.g., scrapers, trucks, graders, etc.).
- What personal protective equipment is required.
- Practices and procedures for that job (how to stop and slow traffic), where to stand, etc. The traffic control zone will vary depending on the speed allowed on the roadway, volume of traffic, weather conditions, if there is a curve or hill, etc.
- What communication methods will be used, including how to use radios, hand signals, etc.
- What to do in an emergency, including your personal escape route in case a vehicle comes too close.
- Be sure you have adequate eye sight and hearing ability to do this job safely.
- How communication will be handled if there is a need for a third (or more) traffic control person, such as when the work zone is around curves or hills where sight lines to the other end of the work zone are obstructed.
- That the “stop-slow” sign you will use is in good repair (e.g., undamaged, clean).
- That measures are in place and at appropriate distances to give motorist enough warning to slow down.
- How to report incidents (near-misses, accidents, etc.).
- That a traffic control person should never leave their position unattended (e.g., know what the arrangements are for meals and breaks).

What should a traffic control person do when controlling traffic?

When controlling traffic, a traffic control person should:

- Always stay alert. The situation can change very quickly.
- Be visible. Stand where you can see traffic, and be seen by traffic.
- Think ahead and plan your escape route. Know where you will move to if a motorist drives too close.
- Stand “alone”, which in this case means do not stand in a group of people, or beside or in a vehicle or other distractions. Drivers must be able to see you clearly.
- Stand the correct distance from the work area. This position will vary with the visibility, speed and volume of traffic. In general, this spot is halfway between the beginning of the taper or detour zone, and the traffic control person sign. Do not stand too close to the taper, or in the travel lane.
- Keep visual contact with the other traffic control person if you are not using radios.
- Work as a team with other traffic control persons. Always check with the other traffic control person to see if it is safe to allow traffic to move. When two or more traffic control persons are required to work as a team at the worksite, responsibility for coordination of changes in traffic flow could be assigned to one person.
- Hold the stop/slow sign away from your body, and in the driver’s line of sight.
- Raise your free hand with the palm facing the driver to stop traffic.
- Allow time for the vehicle to stop safely by turning the sign when the vehicle is at an appropriate distance away for the speed it is travelling.
- After stopping the first vehicle, move to a safe position where the incoming next vehicle can see you.
- Be aware of everything going on around you, behind you, lane beside you, etc.
- When you are ready to release traffic, return to your position outside the travel lane, confirm with the other traffic control person it is safe to let traffic move, turn the sign to “slow”, and with your free arm, signal to drivers to proceed.

- To slow moving traffic, extend the slow sign away from your body (but do not wave it), and use your free hand in an up and down motion (palm down).
- Be alert for emergency vehicles (police, fire, ambulance). These vehicles have priority through the traffic control zone.
- Guide cyclists and pedestrians safely through the zone as well.
- Cover or remove traffic control person signs when there are no traffic control persons present.
- Do not assume a vehicle will stop until it has actually come to a full and complete stop.
- Do not look away from on-coming traffic.
- Do not do any other activity, other than control traffic.
- Do not use other devices (other than your communication radio) which may distract you or impair your sight, hearing or take attention from the job. These devices include personal music players, cell phones, etc. Only use a cell phone for on-site emergency communication, if permitted.
- Do not participate in arguments with motorists. Be polite, do not retaliate, stay back, and stay safe. If necessary, record the incident and report it to your supervisor.
- Do not try to enforce situations that appear to be breaking highway traffic acts (e.g., speeding, dangerous driving, driving while impaired, etc.). Make a note of the licence plate on the vehicle, and discuss with your supervisor. Call the police or emergency services for assistance.
- Do not use radio communication when blasting activities are occurring.

What personal protective equipment should be used?

Wear personal protective equipment that is CSA approved, including:

- A vest or other clothing that is the appropriate class of high visibility material
- A hard hat
- Safety footwear
- Eye protection
- Hearing protection

Be sure that clothing, or eye and hearing protection do not interfere with your ability to see and hear while working.

Other tips include:

- Use a sign that is designed specifically to direct traffic (stop/slow). Be sure the sign is in good repair, and meets the height and size requirements for your jurisdiction.
- Carry spare batteries for the communication radio.
- For poor light or night conditions, use a flashlight fitted with a red signalling wand, and carry spare batteries for the flashlight. Reflective material on your hard hat and clothing will also help you be more visible.
- For poor light or night conditions, where possible, stand under a street light, or install overhead lighting that will allow motorists to see the traffic control person more easily.
- Dress according to the weather, and be prepared for when the weather changes. Depending on the environmental conditions, clothing may include sunglasses, sunscreen and insect repellent, high visibility rain gear, warm layered clothing (including gloves, winter boots, and hard hat liners).
- Where appropriate, carry protection from wildlife, including bear bangers or bear mace.
- Use a portable horn or whistle to alert other workers when necessary.
- Carry a book for note taking.