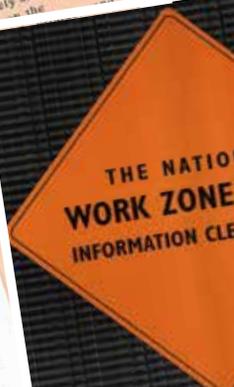
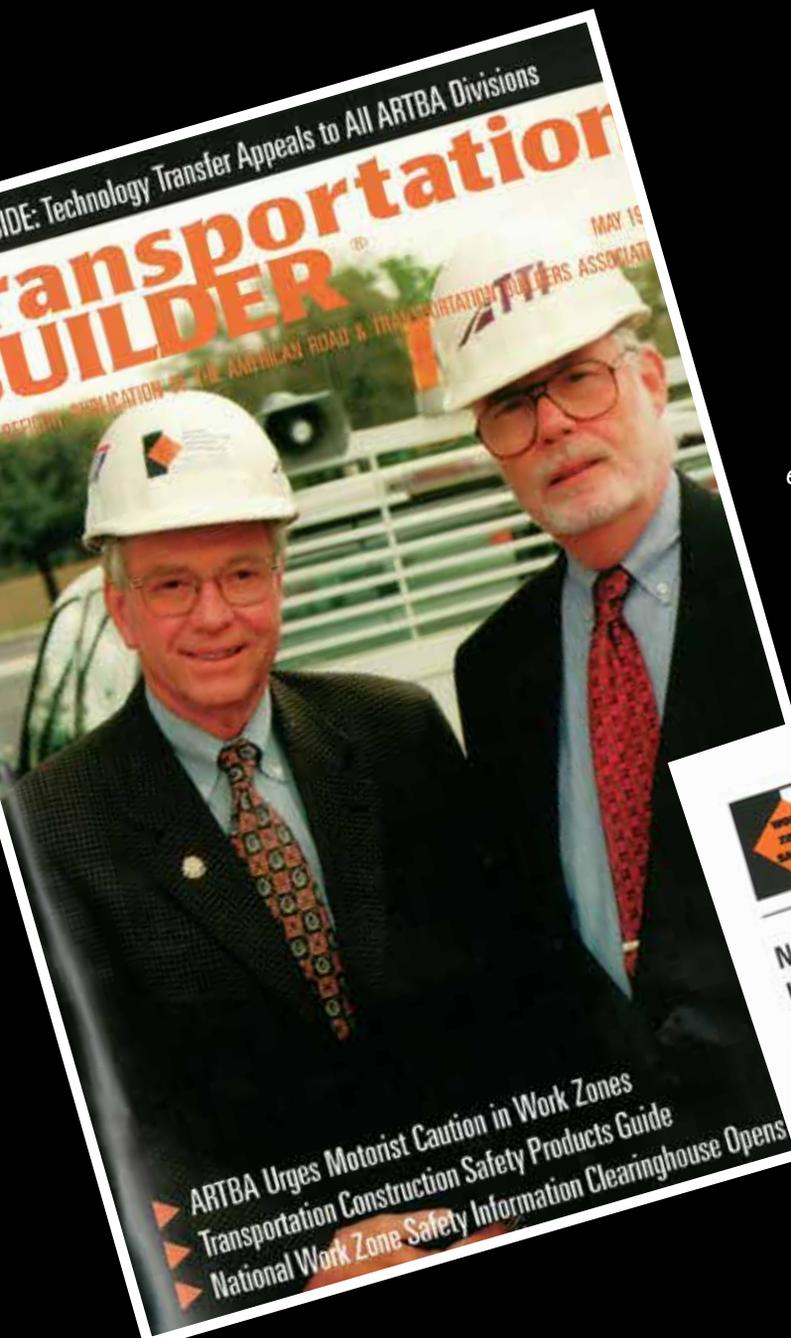


National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse Turns

20

By Mark Holan
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Texas A&M Transportation Institute senior research engineer Gerry Ullman also contributed to this story.





4,000 people a month are using the Internet to improve roadway construction safety.

What Are You Waiting For?

The National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse is an online resource that helps you protect your greatest asset: your safety. Now, just a click away on the Internet, the clearinghouse maintains the world's largest "cyberlibrary." It contains information on safety practices, technologies, and products.

At the Clearinghouse website, you'll find:

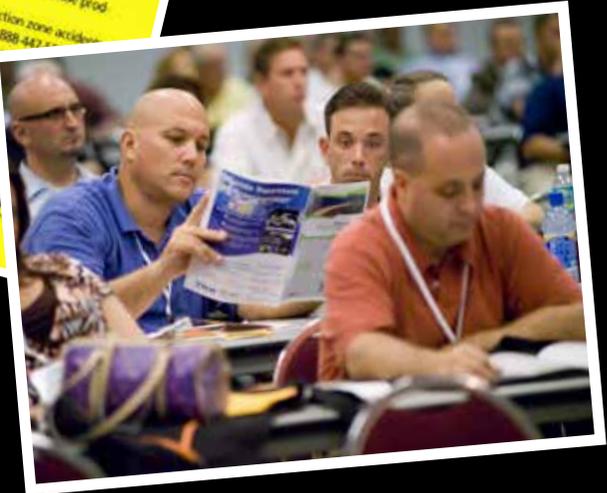
- traffic control and safety "best practices"
- latest technologies
- safety training courses and programs
- state transportation department safety coordinators
- traffic safety products and services
- related laws and regulations
- legal cases

wzsafety.tamu.edu

LEARNING ABOUT IT.

Recommend safety consultants, products and services. The Utility Contractors Association and the Transportation Engineers are marketing the Clearinghouse through the RTBA in promoting Clearinghouse products.

Learn more about road construction zone accident prevention through the Clearinghouse, toll-free, at 1-888-442-7272 or visit us at wzsafety.tamu.edu or clearinghouse@tamu.edu. For information on sponsorship opportunities, contact clearinghouse@tamu.edu.



“We consider the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse as the ‘go to’ resource for work zone related environmental health and safety issues,” Carl Heinlein, senior safety consultant at American Contractors Insurance Group, recently declared.

Such a view was one of the goals when the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse—a ground-breaking resource to save lives, prevent injuries and share information—was launched 20 years ago.

Created by a cooperative agreement between the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Clearinghouse opened five months later. The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) has assisted in carrying out the mission since the beginning.

And the mission is very clear: collect, synthesize, disseminate, and facilitate the exchange of data and information on ways to improve construction zone safety for motorists, pedestrians and highway workers. In doing so, help to prevent or reduce work zone fatalities and injuries.

Implementing a Vision

Like most good ideas, this one didn’t happen overnight, or without a few key people and groups putting their shoulders to the wheel. In the 1980s, ARTBA began conducting national conferences on highway work zone safety, which attracted participants from industry, government, law enforcement and academia.

“ARTBA advanced the idea of creating a clearinghouse to collect and share information on how to make roadway work zones safer at a national conference we organized with the FHWA,” ARTBA President & CEO Pete Ruane recalls.

The December 1994 event was co-sponsored by the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA).

“The Clearinghouse emerged as a major consensus recommendation and we brought it to Congress,” Ruane said. “The 1995 National Highway System Designation Act authorized the U.S. Department of Transportation to make such a clearinghouse a reality.”

After ARTBA won the competitive contract, Ruane signed the cooperative agreement with FHWA in September 1997. As Congress debated a federal highway program reauthorization, ARTBA and TTI got busy making the Clearinghouse operational by February 1998.

“This one-of-a-kind facility provides transportation agencies, law enforcement departments, highway designers and contractors, labor unions, insurance companies, motor clubs and other interested parties with a wealth of information on how to make road construction zones safer for motorists, pedestrians and highway workers.”

--Spring 1998 description of the new National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse.



"The focus on construction used to be 'just get the job done,' " Joe Lasek, then FHWA's senior safety program engineer, said at the time. "Now it is to get the job done and improve construction and maintenance of work zones for the workers and the motorists."

Evolving Technology

Until the creation of the Clearinghouse, work zone professionals had limited ability to tap information on either completed or ongoing research, crash data and trends, and innovative safety practices being deployed by public agencies and private contractors across the nation.

Given these challenges, the original design and operation of the Clearinghouse focused on collecting, collating, and circulating this and other important safety information, including:

- new technologies and equipment;
- training courses;
- public information and outreach campaigns;
- educational materials and programs for new drivers; and
- work zone laws and legislation.

Users had the option of contacting the Clearinghouse by telephone, fax, email, or regular mail. The goal was to respond to these "telephonic and electronic requests" within 24 hours.

"I think one of the best things we did early on was convince the FHWA to take a leap with us and embrace the then just-emerging 'world wide web' and use the internet as the information portal," Ruane said. "That opened up the Clearinghouse and its content to millions of people worldwide."

As online activity since then mushroomed from curiosity to commonplace, more than 10,000 Clearinghouse



1997 - 2017 Clearinghouse By the Numbers

9.5 MILLION

Page views

2 MILLION

Information requests filled

6,000

Searchable content files

3,400

Conference & workshop attendees

1,600

Listserv members

1,500

Archived database files

400

Average daily users

225

User home countries

50

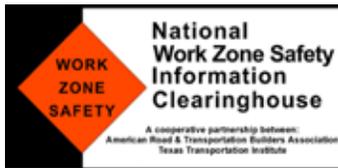
User home states, plus
Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico

17

Clearinghouse conferences
and workshops

Evolution of a Logo

1997-2005



2005-2010



2010-present



database pages have been viewed nearly 10 million times by users all over the world. Industry experts see the positive impact.

"I can comfortably say that the information within the Clearinghouse has helped transportation contractors of all sizes help prevent serious injuries and illnesses not only for transportation construction workers but the driving public, and pedestrians, motorcycle and bike riders," American Contractors Insurance Groups' Heinlein says.

“ Texas A&M Transportation Institute is proud to have been a partner with ARTBA and FHWA in developing and operating the Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse these past 20 years. The initiative has been essential to disseminating work zone safety research findings and technology transfer efforts as broadly as possible and in a timely manner. TTI looks forward to continuing the partnership for another 20 years.”

--TTI Agency Director Greg Winfree

Keeping Clearinghouse Doors Open

The original ARTBA-FHWA Clearinghouse agreement provided only partial funding for the first few years of operation. The Clearinghouse was to become self-sustaining through contributions from user groups who relied on its resources.

A board of advisors was established to provide guidance for Clearinghouse activities and to help identify and procure sources of financial support.

As federal funding ended in late 2000, the ARTBA Transportation Development Foundation (ARTBA-TDF) assumed financial responsibility for Clearinghouse operations. The TDF, in conjunction with TTI, AASHTO, the Laborers-Employers Cooperation & Education Trust (LECET) and several other associations and companies, provided funding to keep the Clearinghouse doors open.

National conferences on work zone safety also were established to raise awareness about the Clearinghouse, develop additional funding sources and disseminate the growing inventory of information.

Still, user-generated funding fell short of keeping pace with rapid developments in how online sites were being designed and operated. After nearly five years of operation without federal support, ARTBA and other Clearinghouse supporters were deployed to convince Congress of the need for a consistent funding source.

In 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users



(SAFETEA-21) included funding for the Clearinghouse to significantly expand and upgrade its services. This dedicated funding allowed the Clearinghouse staff to redesign the website and databases. A national listserv also was launched to allow members to ask each other questions and provide comments on work zone-related issues.

The dedicated funding, which continues to this day, also has allowed national work zone conferences to continue on a biannual basis, and for direct information outreach and dissemination efforts to be performed at other conferences and events.

The Next 20 Years

“The Clearinghouse will retain its laser focus for the next 20 years,” says Paul Yarossi, ARTBA-TDF chairman, who is an HNTB executive vice president. “Our commitment to improving safety and reducing accidents and injuries in road construction zones is unending.”

User surveys and unsolicited comments received over the years indicate that the Clearinghouse continues to provide a needed, valuable service to a wide range of users for making work zones as safe as possible. Even so, Clearinghouse operators will continue listening to users’ needs and taking advantage of new technology to make the resource as easy to use and beneficial as possible.

For example, responsive web design methods were included in a recent update to make Clearinghouse information more accessible to smart phone and tablet users. Information and resources about the latest critical work zone safety issues are also being developed and made available on “Hot Topics” pages of the website. A subject matter expert advisory group continues to identify and guide other improvement efforts.

Technology holds the key, said ARTBA’s Ruane.

“Just like we did at the start-up, we’re going to continue to embrace and exploit innovative technologies for teaching and conveying information as they develop,” he said. “Who knows? Don’t be surprised to see the Clearinghouse portal offering virtual reality experiences someday soon.”

Mark Holan is ARTBA editorial director.

Back in 1997

ARTBA and the U.S. Department of Transportation established the National Work Zone Safety Clearinghouse in the fall of 1997. Here’s some of what else was going on that year.

- Rodney E. Slater replaced Federico Pena as U.S. secretary of transportation.
- Google.com registered as a domain.
- The first “Web log” appeared online, and the term soon contracted into “blog.”
- About one in five Americans got news online “at least once a week.”
- ARTBA launched its website, www.artba.org.

Sources: ARTBA, Pew Research Center, general news.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

“The FHWA and the American Road & Transportation Builders Association in February created a work-zone information clearinghouse as part of the Texas A&M system in College Station, Texas, to help reduce deaths. But now, the big new road-building program could expand the problem. “The builders’ group will soon run its first national ad campaign, urging careful driving in work zones...”

--June 30, 1998



“[The Clearinghouse] provides the kind of leadership that can save lives... it is what the industry and public deserve.”

--March 9, 1998