

# 3PointTurn – Episode 10: Safety in Zones

## **FLHSMV:**

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On this episode, the FLHSMV team talks about how to drive safe in zones where people may be present along the road, both as pedestrians and as workers.

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## **Derek Perez:**

Welcome to 3PointTurn. I'm your host, Derek Perez. I'm joined by Major Chris Blackmon, a 30-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol and FHP's Troop H commander. Time to run this back for a second time, Major.

## **Major Chris Blackmon:**

I'm game for whatever you got. Let's do it.

## **Derek Perez:**

Well, I'm throwing curve ball after curve ball in this episode. No soft questions, get ready. Well, Major, we're not going to talk about strike zones, but we are going to talk about three other zones. Want to tell our listeners what those are?

## **Major Chris Blackmon:**

Absolutely. Schools zones, crossing zones, and work zones, or commonly called construction zones.

## **Derek Perez:**

Alright. People on the side of the road or using the road legally as pedestrians who have no protection and rely on drivers to understand the rules of the road. Let's break it down. Major, unless there's a once-in-a-century pandemic, school is typically in session for nearly 10 months out of the year. What should drivers be alert about when in a school zone?

## **Major Chris Blackmon:**

The biggest thing is the children. Obey the speed limits because most of the schools zones have the flashing signs which reduces the speed down to 20 miles an hour, 25 miles an hour. The signs are flashing. So adhere to the speed limit because you don't want some child running across the street in front of you who thinks they're late for school or trying to go meet their friend and run across the hood of your car, and you strike that child and potentially injure or kill the child.

## **Derek Perez:**

Children running to school or getting to school can be quite unpredictable, whether they're on bikes or whether they're pedestrians. It's very important to drive slowly with a focused and a prepared plan to brake suddenly should they run out into traffic or behave unexpectedly. Now school zones or crossing zones, these topics merge at intersections and designated crossing zones exist next to schools. Can you talk a little about crossing zones and the crossing guards that are there?

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### **Major Chris Blackmon:**

Yeah, the crossing guards are there for the security and safety of the children. You'll see them out with their stop paddles up, they put them up and they ask you to stop for the child. The biggest thing in this area that we found is distracted driving, whether it's taking care of a child in the backseat of the car, whether it's, sadly, people tying their tie, women putting on makeup, men shaving, read the newspaper, and sadly, a lot of people still text while driving in a school zone. So it's of the utmost importance to have your focus when you're in the school zone, when the sign's flashing and it says 20 miles an hour, to reduce your speed and focus totally on driving the vehicle because you have no idea what's coming at you, whether it may be another car or more importantly, a child.

### **Derek Perez:**

Now there are penalties in place, including speeding fines when you encounter a school zone or crossing zone and fail to obey those rules. Would you care to step into that for me, Major?

### **Major Chris Blackmon:**

Absolutely. The fines double in both the construction zones and the schools zones. But when you speed over 30 miles per hour, it's a mandatory court appearance before a judge. So then you go in and your fine, typically it's going to be in the neighborhood of a thousand dollars or greater, and it's going to be very detrimental to you and your pocket when the insurance company gets a hold of that and sees that you were speeding in a school zone or construction zone.

### **Derek Perez:**

And, of course, the worst thing, the absolute worst thing that could happen is a crash with a child or another pedestrian because of your negligence. Now, we do have a side topic that we have to cover, and that is school bus safety. Major, would you take us through the prescribed behaviors for a motorist when they encounter a school bus picking off or dropping off school children?

### **Major Chris Blackmon:**

Biggest thing is treat it like a moving school zone. Slow down, because again, the school buses are stopping, picking up the children. When the stop sign comes out, stop, because again, there's enhanced penalties and fees for that to run a school bus. So pay attention because if a bus is stopped, your focus may be ahead, but who knows where the child's coming from. If they've left their house late, they could be running up behind you, beside you, crossing in front of you, so it's of the utmost importance to pay attention to your surroundings around the school bus.

### **Derek Perez:**

So remember, motorists must stop when approaching a school bus that is stopped with its red lights flashing and its stop arms extended. All drivers moving in either direction on a two-way street or a highway divided by a paved median must stop for a school bus displaying a stop signal. They must remain stopped until the road is clear of children and the school bus stop arm has withdrawn. There are some exceptions, however. Traffic does not need to stop for a school bus if approaching from an oncoming direction with a raised barrier, like a concrete divider, or at least five feet of unpaved space, a grass median, for example.

However, the penalties for drivers who fail to stop for a school bus and the zones it provides for students to walk, can be quite stiff. It includes points on their license and they must complete a driver

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improvement course. A driver causing the injury of a student while passing a stopped school bus also faces a minimum \$1,500 fine, community service or jail time, and a suspension of their license. Well, thank you Major Blackmon. This has been incredibly helpful information. When we come back after a quick break, we'll widen our look at zones by discussing crosswalks and pedestrian safety.

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### **Derek Perez:**

Welcome back to 3PointTurn, as our safety discussion moves from school zones to crossing zones. This is an overarching look at keeping pedestrians safe. And I know this is a big deal because in Tallahassee where FLHSMV's headquarters is based, there have been a couple of pedestrian deaths at crosswalks because drivers just weren't paying attention. Major Blackmon, have you had to answer any unfortunate calls related to pedestrian crashes?

### **Major Chris Blackmon:**

Far too many.

### **Derek Perez:**

Designated crosswalks appear either at an intersection or mid-block. Let's break this down further. What should our listeners key on, Major?

### **Major Chris Blackmon:**

First thing is when you approach the intersection and crosswalks, look for the pedestrians because pedestrians sometimes are using their right-of-way, sometimes they're not. Again, as we spoke about earlier, pay attention to surroundings and what's coming at you. Yield to the pedestrians because Florida law requires a motorist to allow the pedestrians to cross legally in the designated areas. Failure to yield results in fines and points and could ultimately lead to death. And I don't want to live with that, the fact that I was involved in a crash and someone died from it. For me it'd be too hard to live with.

All sides of intersection or crosswalks and crosswalk safety, if you're driving along a road and there's a cross street, you must yield to any pedestrian in an unmarked crosswalk at the intersection. If another vehicle is stopped ahead of you at a crosswalk, do not pass that vehicle. There may be a crossing pedestrian hidden behind the first vehicle that you cannot see.

### **Derek Perez:**

Well, we've talked about yielding to pedestrians and that all sides of an intersection are in fact crosswalks whether they're marked or not. And of course, remember bicyclists are in fact considered pedestrians when they're on the sidewalk. While most associate pedestrians as people walking or

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running, bicyclists are allowed to use sidewalks and crosswalks. The law covers them as well. And as drivers, you have to be prepared to slow or stop at any time for emergency vehicles, buses, bicyclists, animals, other motorists slowing to turn, and many other situations. Now, if you were driving along a road where there's a cross street, you must yield to any pedestrian in an unmarked crosswalk at that intersection. If another vehicle is stopped ahead of you at a crosswalk, do not pass that vehicle. You pointed that out earlier, there may be a crossing pedestrian hidden behind that first vehicle, but it always bears repeating. Is it true that jaywalking is not found in Florida statutes and doesn't have a legal meaning in this state?

**Major Chris Blackmon:**

It does not. Again, that's just a term we commonly use, I think all of us use it, but it's actually not a legal definition or term.

**Derek Perez:**

Now some actions that people call jaywalking though, such as crossing against a red light, are illegal. Is that correct?

**Major Chris Blackmon:**

Yes, that's correct.

**Derek Perez:**

Well, that was a lot to digest in a quick period of time. But remember, yield to pedestrians, consider bicyclists pedestrians when on sidewalks and crosswalks, remember to look at all sides of an intersection and consider them as crosswalks, be aware of interesting or non-traditional intersections like mid-block crosswalks, and of course always pay extra attention to crosswalk safety. Okay, one more quick break and Major Blackmon and I will finish up this episode safety conversation with a discussion on work zones.

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**Derek Perez:**

Welcome back to 3PointTurn. Major Blackmon and I have discussed how motorists can keep pedestrians safe in school and crossing zones. Now we're going to look at work zones. A couple of quick notes about this topic, Major, is how it interacts with two other points involving Florida laws that we have discussed in this podcast series. Can you help remind our listeners about these laws?

**Major Chris Blackmon:**

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Absolutely. First, there's Florida's distracted driving law. It covers the active work zones or construction zones. If you use your phone in an active work zone or anything other than a hands-free manner, you can be stopped by law enforcement and ultimately issued a citation and a very stiff penalty. Second, Florida's move over law covers utility trucks and others who might be working along the highway or interstate such as our Florida state troopers. You're required to move over a lane for safety for those workers, and if you don't, you can be cited.

**Derek Perez:**

As you've said, you've probably seen a lot of that, right, Major? FHP gets stationed at work zones and troopers' cars will have their lights on.

**Major Chris Blackmon:**

Absolutely. Troopers are providing security and safety to try to slow down the motoring public for the work zone, so the construction workers can do their job properly and continue to build the infrastructure of Florida, make our roads better and bridges better, and continue to let traffic flow.

**Derek Perez:**

Well, an important point is to define this. So how do you define an active work zone?

**Major Chris Blackmon:**

It's an area where road work takes place, construction work, involves many lane closures, detours, a lot of moving machinery and equipment. Most of the time the workers are present, but the absence of them does not change a work zone from an active to an inactive zone.

**Derek Perez:**

Work zones on highways have become increasingly dangerous places for both workers and drivers. Major, in what ways can motorists follow the law and provide safe work zones for construction and other forms of highway labor?

**Major Chris Blackmon:**

Biggest thing is put your phones down, no distracted driving, slow down, because I'm sure you've seen the signs where it says, "My mommy works here," or "My daddy works here," in the construction zones. Those are people out there doing a job for us, as a citizen of the state of Florida, to repave our roads, build our roads, so we can continue to commute. So, treat them with the utmost respect as well. Slow down, pay attention to the work zones until you clear it, and then resume your normal speed.

**Derek Perez:**

It's also important to expect the unexpected, you know, travel can slow to a crawl or stop altogether in a work zone. It might not be convenient for you, but please remain patient. Often, multiple lanes may be reduced to one or two, requiring merging. Be courteous to other motorists and never tailgate so there's lots of time to stop whether you have warning or not. Of course, follow the rules. As we said, don't tailgate other motorists, pay attention to flaggers or signage. You're also not allowed to make your own route. Driving on a median or shoulder, past other drivers or cutting across the median in the grass, is extremely dangerous and illegal. As Major Blackmon pointed out, move over. It's the law. If required or directed by a lighted arrow, move over. If you see work crews along the interstate or highway

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performing other types of service, move over or at the very least slow down 20 miles an hour. And avoid using your phone or some other activities like eating that could distract you while you're in a work zone.

According to the National Safety Council, over 100 road construction workers are killed in construction zones each year. In 2016, Florida had the second highest number of fatal traffic crashes in work zones in the nation. Data shows that workers were present in the work zone in 35% of the fatal crashes and 44% of the crashes resulted in serious injury. So slow down and pay attention. There's no substitute for safety, Major Blackmon. This is important advice for drivers of all experience levels. We'll continue our conversation in another episode. And until next time, drive safe Florida.

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### **FLHSMV:**

On the next episode of 3PointTurn, the FLHSMV team talks about defensive driving and three tips to keep your vehicle from getting in a crash.

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