

Workers face death and injury on the highway jobs

Most of us are told by our parents not to be in the streets. For many Department of Transportation employees that's part of their jobs — a dangerous part.

The death of Tony Collier, 26, a resident of Keizer and a member of the Association of Engineering Employees, and the severe injury of **Mike Salisbury**, of Scappoose, an OPEU member who works out of the North Portland maintenance yard, bring this home again.

MEMBER INJURED - Salisbury, who is still in the hospital with head injuries, two broken legs, and a broken arm, was called back to work on a day off, the Memorial Day holiday this year, to remove pallets

Collier was killed in the north-bound lane of Interstate 5 about two miles north of Gold Hill while working on a survey crew. His work demanded that he straddle the white line, known as the fog line, with his back to the oncoming traffic on the right side of the road. The driver who hit Collier was cited for careless driving, which carries a maximum fine of \$470, since there is no evidence the driver was speeding, weaving across the roadway, driving drunk, or

otherwise creating a hazard, which would be necessary for a more serious charge of criminally negligent homicide.

Getting drivers to slow down and pay special attention to construction zones or workers working in the roadway has always been an uphill battle, workers say.



OPEU member Mike Salisbury was injured badly on Memorial Day working on I-5.

ODOT began its "Give 'Em a Brake" campaign in 1989 to educate drivers about the importance of driving carefully through construction zones. Between 1986 and 1993, the state has averaged 11 to 12 deaths per year from traffic accidents in construction zones, with a peak of 16 in 1989. Those numbers include deaths of motorists and pedestrians, as well as construction workers.

To combat the problem of deaths and injuries to highway work-

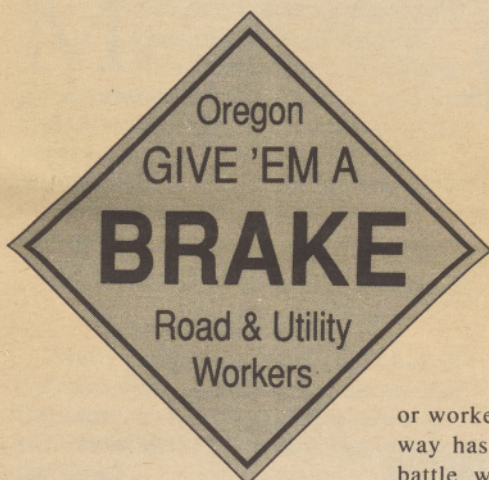
ers, ODOT will examine the circumstances around Collier's death and Salisbury's injury, try to draw some conclusions from them and develop some policy and training programs.

"We're not taking this lightly," said Dave White, management of ODOT's safety and employee services section.

DANGER PERSISTS - Still, the problem of danger on the highways for workers persists. As this article was being prepared a flagger, an employee of an ODOT contractor, was run over by someone on a motorcycle. ODOT workers tell of aggressive action taken against them by motorists. At the worksite on Highway 217 west of Portland, a flagger was punched by a motorist.

The first recorded fatality of a maintenance flagger for which records still are available occurred in 1939 in the vicinity of Cascade Locks. Since then, there have been 61 more.

The workers are in a bit of a bind: They can't work scared because they can't work efficiently that way. But, they can't let their guard down. There is a danger of becoming complacent as you become accustomed to a life of work with cars whizzing by at 55-60 miles per hour.



that had fallen off a truck traveling south on Interstate 5 in Portland.

According to OPEU Shop Steward **Jim McNamee**, Salisbury was hit by a truck that didn't have the room it needed to maneuver to avoid hitting either Salisbury or one of the pallets.

The truck that hit Salisbury was following a larger truck. "The driver had few choices," said McNamee. "It couldn't go left because there was a pallet in the road, so it maneuvered right and there was Mike."

FREEWAYS DANGEROUS - The freeways are especially dangerous, said McNamee. "You're never able to take your eye off the traffic as the vehicles go by at 55-60 miles per hour."

7 workers find ways to save \$900,000 a year

Seven state employees — four of them OPEU/SEIU Local 503 members — were honored recently for suggestions which could achieve first-year savings of nearly \$900,000.

Employees who submit suggestions with verified cost reduction receive a cash award of 5% to 10% of the first-year savings up to \$5,000.

The program has generated a combined first-year savings of almost \$12 million since its initiation in 1980.

• Welfare Office Worker Local 461 **Bob LeDoux** and a co-worker, both budget analysts, share the award for the largest savings, \$292,500. Their idea is to recom-

mend better checking of client medical claims to obtain federal matching dollars, offsetting state expense.

• Consumer and Business Services Local 440 activist **Judy Sugnet**, an OrOSHA resource center coordinator, suggested eliminating publication and distribution of rule changes which duplicate federal regulations for a savings of \$228,011.

• Administrative Services Local 125 member **Bettie Lou Cline**, a motor pool automotive mechanic, showed that the motor pool could extend maintenance schedules without damaging vehicles, compromising safety, or violating warranties

for a first-year savings of \$190,000.

• Justice Local 137 member **Kelly Tremaine**, a child support agent, found that parents owing child support could be located through Fish and Wildlife licensing records and save \$50,000.

• A State Police telecommunications maintenance worker suggested that employees construct 17 small utility buildings as part of regular duties in lieu of contracting out the work and save \$69,000.

• A Forestry Department map inventory planning assistant devised a method of converting data into a form usable by a high-tech mapping process, saving \$59,540.