Joe Smithson inspects one of three 8 ft. diameter fans as part of the Lytle Tunnel fire suppression system. The system is supported by cameras and a fire detection system to improve safety and incident response time.

PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE
Worker safety is a top priority and one of our critical success factors. Also, feedback from ODOT people is essential as we strive to do things right. So, when it came time to renew the voluntary boot and uniform program, we knew there was room for improvement.

Based on your feedback, we decided to revamp the annual boot program by allowing eligible ODOT people to pick out their own boots and be reimbursed the cost up to $125. With the previous program, you could only choose boots from the approved contract, but now you can choose the boot that best fits your needs and preference. Eligible ODOTers have until August 31 to participate. Of course, the boots must meet all safety requirements such as a minimum six-inch ankle, steel or composite toe and puncture resistant sole. If you’re a new hire, you will have thirty days to participate. Of course, the boots must meet all safety standards. New people will be able to participate at the time of hire.

Our vision statement talks about being professional. Professional means you do things right, use the proper equipment in the appropriate way and in a safe manner. Our goal with these programs, along with our jacket program, is to not only make workers safer, but to promote an awareness of safety and a sense of team. I hope you choose to participate, and remember, please continue to speak up and let us know how we can improve. Thank you for all you do.

Wild, Wild Life

Ashley Rittenhouse, District 10

As part of the Nelsonville Bypass project through the Wayne National Forest, ODOT was required to implement measures to maintain the amphibian population (salamanders, frogs and toads), including wildlife culverts and fencing. Hill researchers discovered that between 2015 and 2016, 13,251 amphibians were found dead along a 1.2 mile stretch of State Route 78.

“The research found that the tunnels specifically marketed for amphibian crossings and installed in the original construction didn’t work for us,” said District Planning Engineer Alan Craig. Experiments were conducted by OU to develop a better crossing design.”

Researchers determined the new passages should be as wide as possible, provide as much sky exposure as possible and have a maintained line-of-sight. Soil and sand were placed in the bottom of the box sections, and grates were used for the tops of them. Woven fabric fencing was placed between the openings of each amphibian crossing to “tunnel” the amphibians toward the openings.

The culverts bridge a wetland on one side of the road with a wooded area on the other side which is used during winter hibernation. The passages also benefit turtles, snakes and small mammals.

Roadway Service Engineer Bob Zwick noted that the project was unique and presented many challenges: “To get a smooth final surface, the top of each box section had to match the existing road surface elevation.” The culvert bridge will be 24 feet above the road. The culvert bridge will be 24 feet above the road. The culvert bridge will be 24 feet above the road. The culvert bridge will be 24 feet above the road.

It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane... It’s a Drone?

Erica Hawkins, Central Office

DriveOhio, the state’s new center for coordinating smart mobility initiatives, is studying the use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), sometimes called drones, to monitor traffic and roadway conditions from the air along the 33 Smart Mobility Corridor. The three-year, $5.9 million study is a partnership between DriveOhio’s UAS Center and The Ohio State University College of Engineering. The project team will be led by DriveOhio and The Ohio State University’s College of Engineering in conjunction with Cal Analytics, Gannett Fleming, AIRXOS (a GE venture), Gryphon Sensors, Transportation Research Center, Inc., Woolpert, The Ohio State University Airport, and Midwest Air Traffic Control. The three-year research project began July 1.

This research will include both air and ground vehicles and will complement ongoing work to test autonomous and connected vehicles along the 33 Smart Mobility Corridor, a 35-mile stretch of U.S. 33 between Dublin and East Liberty. Unmanned aircraft will monitor traffic and incident response along the corridor in conjunction with the state’s current fixed-location traffic camera system. The aircraft will interact with sensors and communication equipment along the corridor to feed data into the state’s Traffic Management Center.

“At DriveOhio, we are looking for innovative ways to integrate technology into our transportation systems. This project will help us explore the intersection between autonomous and connected vehicles on land and in the air. The goal is to understand how we can better manage traffic, roadway incidents and roadway conditions using advanced technology and data analysis,” said Jim Barna, Executive Director of DriveOhio.

The project will also use sensors and communication devices to ensure the unmanned aircraft will not collide with each other or with manned aircraft, such as small planes and helicopters, that also use the lower altitude airspace. It is estimated that as many as 5,000 manned aircraft are in the sky at any given time.

“One of the keys to better utilizing unmanned aircraft is to ensure they will not pose a threat to other aircraft traveling in the area. This research project will make the development of that safety system a priority so that other aircraft operations such as package delivery and air taxi services can be explored down the road,” said Fred Judson, Director of DriveOhio’s UAS Center.

DriveOhio was created by Governor Kasich on January 18, 2018, as a center within ODOT that brings together those who are responsible for building infrastructure in Ohio with those who are developing the advanced mobility technologies needed to allow the state’s transportation system to reach its full potential.
Plowing Ahead of the Rest
Nick Buchanan, District 1

Sure, black plow blades are functional snow removal tools for drivers, but they make great canvases for artists, too. This year, District 1 matched its record number of schools to have signed up to adorn blades in the district’s snowplow fleet – at least one per county - 21 participants in all.

District 1’s Paint the Plow program was launched in 2014. The program is open to high schools and adult vocational schools within District 1’s eight-county area. The first-ever people’s choice winner, Apollo Career Center in Lima, was determined through social media votes. Apollo Career Center’s patriotic plow received 925 votes on Facebook. A combined total of 6,675 votes were placed across the 21 plows.

Art Connections, a leg of Angeline Industries in Wyandot County, allows adults with developmental disabilities to design, create and sell art pieces. Their entry was declared the ODOT choice winner, as voted by employees at the district’s roadeo. Paint the Plow allows Art Connections artists to work on their biggest canvas.

“We draft it out on paper first, and we use it as a math lesson, too. I tell them, “Okay, on paper, it’s in inches, but on the plow, it’ll be feet,’” said Amber Kahler, the art studio facilitator at Art Connections.

The artists’ “Think Spring” montage was inspired by pop art and Andy Warhol. Their inspiration was printed on copy paper and pinned onto the plow during the process for the artists to use as a guide.
Last year marked Ohio’s fourth consecutive year of rising traffic deaths. There is little doubt that distracted driving is playing a role. In fact, last year there were more than 21,000 reported distracted driving related crashes.

How bad is the problem? Look no further than recent dash camera video taken by Columbus Police Officer Keith Connor, which aired on ABC 6/FOX 28. It shows the officer pulling people over for texting and driving and other distracting activities. In the past year and a half, Conner has issued 400 citations and 1,500 warnings for this behavior, which represents the most tickets written across the state.

To address this concern, ODOT and ODPS have created a task force to analyze the problem and make recommendations on how Ohio can prevent these crashes. The task force consists of about 25 people, including law enforcement, victim advocates, insurance companies and AAA. Recommendations will be completed by the end of this year and provided to the incoming gubernatorial administration. “Texting and driving is an epidemic that endangers anyone walking, riding or driving on Ohio roads” said Michelle May of ODOT’s Highway Safety Program. “Most people recognize it’s a danger but do it anyway because they’re addicted to their phones.”

So, what can we do each day to prevent this problem? Put the phone down. Multi-tasking is a myth, and it’s as dangerous as drunk driving. May offered two techniques to break the habit. Drivers can download apps that can silence their texts and other notifications while driving. Another easy tip is to put the phone somewhere you can’t reach it while in the car.

“Central Office Safety has developed an abbreviated application process...[that] allows us to request funds and make safety improvements much quicker.”

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“Be respectful of other people and their right to live,” said May. “Put the phone down!”
Walk of Wisdom
Ron Poole, Central Office

Members of Technical Services in Central Office created their own space for inspiration. Office members were invited to submit quotes from famous figures to be paired with in-house artwork. This display of inspirational memes is arranged on outer cubicle walls along a common hallway path for all to see. The featured sayings were chosen from people of all types, from the late Nelson Mandela to the delightfully deadpan Steven Wright. The display made its debut May 14th.

“We have other ideas for more such entries,” said Andrew Williams, the office administrator and the initiator of the idea, “And we will change out what we have with new concepts in the future. We are really grateful for the wonderful job done by the Division of Communications in putting this together for us.”

They say the universe is expanding. That should help with the traffic.

Steven Wright

The thing that truly separates the good leaders from the great ones starts with a simple, three-letter word: WHY.

WHY do you do what you do?