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KDOT remains vigilant as heat wave continues

So far the Kansas Department of Transportation has been able to beat the sizzling summer heat, but with an extended heat wave in the forecast, the agency is being vigilant.

“Excessive heat can cause problems for highways and for our workers,” said Peter Carttar, KDOT Assistant Chief in the Bureau of Construction and Maintenance. “Right now we haven’t experienced significant issues, but it’s not even July and there’s a lot of summer left.”

Pavement blow-ups along the state’s 9,500 miles of highway are one of the summertime problems. With temperatures expected to continue to exceed over 100 degrees throughout the state the potential exist they could develop in Kansas. The blow-ups occur through thermal expansion of the pavement. It expands with increasing temperatures and the corresponding increase in stress at a joint causes the pavement to push up – or blow-up.

“You never know exactly where one’s going to occur or how bad it will be,” said Carttar. “They usually occur during the heat of the day. Our district maintenance crews are on the look-out for them and address them as they appear.”

Heat-related injuries are a potential hazard for KDOT maintenance and construction workers. Pavement temperature can often soar to more than 30 degrees above air temperature creating stifling working conditions. In the summertime, KDOT

modifies work schedules, usually making the workday from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Starting early and finishing early helps avoid the extreme heat of the day.

KDOT workers use common sense when working in the sun, maintaining proper hydration, wearing cool clothing, taking breaks and getting out of the sun if possible. Workers monitor themselves and their coworkers for signs of heat-related stress.

The potential for wildfires also increases with triple digit temperatures and little or no precipitation. Wednesday, nine counties in west-central Kansas were included in a disaster declaration by the Gov. Sam Brownback. The fires were contained later in the evening.

The dense smoke from wildfires can decrease visibility for motorists. KDOT stresses that vehicles pulling over on to the grass in these conditions are an added danger. Motorists are urged to stay on the roadway because hot exhaust systems can start a fire when conditions are so dry.

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