



Can a Crash Truck Replace Standard Traffic Control?

A **crash truck**, or Truck-Mounted Attenuator (TMA) truck, is a heavy-duty highway safety vehicle equipped with a specialized shock-absorbing cushion on the rear. It acts as a mobile barrier to absorb the kinetic energy of errant vehicles, protecting road workers, motorists, and construction equipment in work zones. They can also be referred to as "shadow vehicles".

A common question in the field is whether a crash truck can be used instead of the required temporary traffic control devices. The answer is **yes—but only in specific situations**.

The Wisconsin Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (WMUTCD) includes the following guidance for **short-duration work operations**:

"For short-duration work, the taper and channelizing devices may be omitted if a shadow vehicle with activated high-intensity rotating, flashing, oscillating, or strobe lights is used."

For utility work, a TMA, or crash truck, is intended to serve as a shadow vehicle positioned upstream of the work area to protect workers and equipment from errant vehicles.

Keep these key points in mind:

- **Extended stationary work:** If the work will remain at one location for an extended period, you should generally use the full temporary traffic control setup, including the appropriate advance warning signs, tapers (when required), and channelizing devices. A crash truck provides additional protection but **does not automatically replace** the required traffic control plan.
- **Short-duration work:** For brief stops, quick maintenance activities, or work that frequently moves from location to location, Wisconsin allows the taper and channelizing devices to be omitted when a properly equipped shadow vehicle is used, as described in the WMUTCD.

Examples:

- A line crew performing quick pole work and moving frequently between locations can use a TMA truck to provide protection, significantly reducing the number of cones required. In qualifying short-duration operations, tapers and channelizing devices may not be required.
- A crew performing work at one location for an hour or more – such as operating a bucket truck and digger truck – should typically install the required signs, channelization, and other temporary traffic control devices in accordance with the applicable WMUTCD Typical Application. The crash truck should be used as **supplemental protection**, not as a substitute for the required traffic control.

Always evaluate the duration of the work, roadway conditions, and the applicable WMUTCD Typical Application before deciding on your traffic control setup. When in doubt, use the higher level of protection.



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