

WisDOT: New podcast spotlights first responder protection law

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Emergency responders put their community first every day. Those who work on our highways directing traffic, providing critical care, or making repairs risk their lives to ensure all travelers are safe on the roads. But what protections exist to keep them safe? Governor Tony Evers signed [Wisconsin Act 115](#) into law less than a year ago. It bans cellphone use within 500-feet of an emergency response area and creates new penalties for drivers who injure or kill a worker on the side of the road.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) latest "[Transportation Connects Us](#)" podcast takes a deep dive into Wisconsin Act 115 to educate listeners about the law, discuss the history of how the law got passed and share a "close call" story from a Wisconsin first responder to illustrate why the law is needed.

"Being outside of your vehicle on the side of the road is a very dangerous place to be when you're helping someone. We need to help people envision that this could be a family member or close friend out there trying to help us," WisDOT Secretary Craig Thompson said.

Wisconsin Act 115 became law in December 2021 thanks to a big assist from the state's first responder community. Amherst Fire District Assistant Fire Chief Brian Swan initiated conversations with lawmakers which ultimately led to the passing of the law.

"There are firefighters that would rather go into a fully engulfed burning building than respond to an accident out on the highway. We have very few tools to protect us out on the highway and this (Wisconsin Act 115) is one of them," Swan said.

Wisconsin State Patrol Trooper David Yang responds to highway incidents every

day. He was inside his cruiser during a roadside stop in Dane County on December 6, 2021, when an inattentive driver slammed into the side of his vehicle. Yang escaped injury but the incident stays with him.

“There was a loud bang and then smoke. Thankfully I had my seatbelt on when it sideswiped me. I’m still here. I’m still alive.” Yang said.

“[Transportation Connect Us](#)” is a podcast series produced by WisDOT which focuses on transportation safety, engineering, transportation investments and DMV topics. Download or subscribe wherever you find your podcasts.