

Department unveils road condition app

Kansas Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller announced Thursday that the department has developed a smart phone application that details road conditions in Kansas.

Miller said the free "511 Mobile" provides map, camera and electronic message sign views, road conditions, work zone and event information and links to weather. The content is provided by six regions across the state and three metropolitan areas (Kansas City, Topeka and Wichita).

The site is accessible from multiple devices, including iPhones, Droids and Windows mobile devices – Version 6.0 and higher. Any devices not compatible with the new application will be able to access text information only for road conditions and work zones.

Miller reminded drivers not to check the application while driving, but to pull over or have a passenger check it.

"We want people to have a safe trip and get home not only alive but unharmed," she said. "Our top priority is always safety."

The announcement was made at a press conference held in cooperation with the

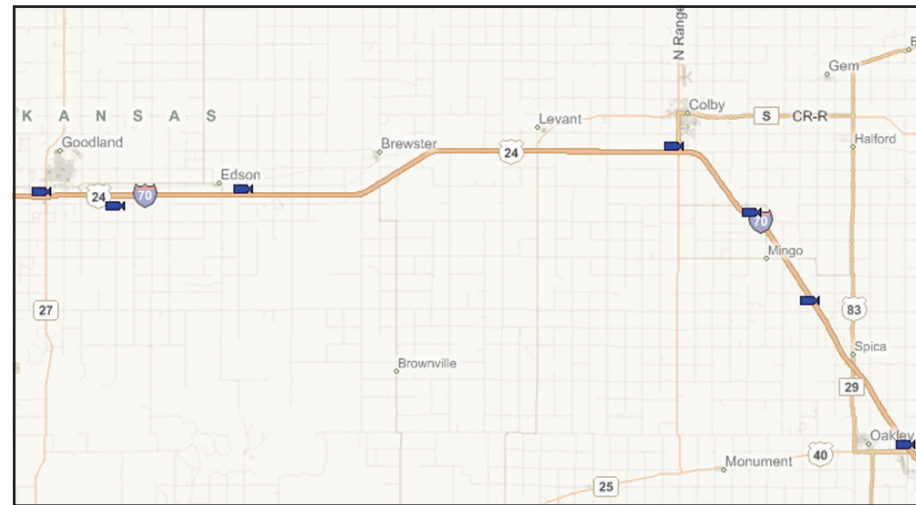
National Weather Service "Kansas Winter Weather Awareness Day." Meteorologist Chad Omitt, who spoke at the conference, said the service has been examining fatalities from bad weather each year. More than 1,000 people are killed each year from winter weather – many in car accidents – he said, while only about 55 are killed by tornados.

Omitt said the service's philosophy is to give people as much information as possible so they can, "know before they go." It's better to look at the weather forecast and decide not to travel than get stuck somewhere. Many people were stranded in Oklahoma by a Christmas blizzard last year that the weather service predicted.

Omitt encouraged drivers to slow down and buckle up when the weather gets bad.

Miller said the department has made several other improvements:

- The voice recognition technology has been upgraded on the 511 Phone system for better accuracy. Travelers may call 511 from anywhere in Kansas or (866) 511-5368 from anywhere in the U.S. to get route-specific road conditions, work zone information, including detours and



KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The KanDrive interactive map shows current road conditions as well as locations of traffic cameras.

closed roads, and travel-related weather information to plan their trips or for updates as they travel.

- Enhanced camera views were added to KanDrive, www.kandrive.org, the department's traveler information web site for Kansas and surrounding states. Camera snapshots of the roadway are updated

every few minutes from closed-circuit cameras installed along I-70 and other highways in other parts of the state.

In addition to the camera tour, KanDrive provides an interactive map of Kansas roads, work zones and other events impacting traffic and surface-related road conditions; roadside message sign views;

and links to related helpful transportation resources, neighboring states' travel information, Kansas Turnpike information, Scenic Byways and more.

• The department has also partnered with Traffickland to make live video from our cameras available to the media.

"Safety for travelers is KDOT's top priority and providing traveler information services is certainly one very important way to keep travelers informed so they can make good travel decisions, especially during harsh winter driving conditions," Miller said.

Miller also reminded drivers that not all snowstorms are alike. Keeping roads clear is a high priority for the department, she said, but it can take different lengths of time depending on snowfall, snow consistency and ice.

"Just because the road is cleared quickly in one storm doesn't mean you can clear it as quickly next time," she said.

The department does its best to get messages out to drivers, she said, but it still has to rely on drivers acting responsibly.

For information, visit www.kandrive.org/info.asp.

Highway Patrol wants safe roads

Each year during winter storms, the Kansas Highway Patrol works numerous car crashes related to the weather. The patrol is encouraging motorists to slow down and be prepared for these conditions.

Driving too fast for conditions ranked in the top five (fourth) contributing circumstances of all crashes last year, contributing to 10.6 percent of all crashes.

There were 4,927 crashes worked during ice and snow conditions, and 20 people died from these crashes in 2009. Last year, two people died in a crash on I-70 in Colby when a driver slid on ice into oncoming traffic.

For 2009, November was the month with the highest number of crashes reported, with over 27 more crashes than any other month of the year. 8.1 percent of all crashes in the state occurred during snow and/or ice conditions.

The patrol is offering tips to drivers as they venture out during one of the first winter storms of the season:

- Prepare your vehicle for winter travel by replacing wiper blades; ensuring tires have good tread and air pressure; and by checking the vehicle's fluids, exhaust system, and other mechanical equipment. You also may want to consider adding a shovel to your trunk, weight such as sand bags in the bed of a pickup (to help with traction and control.) and carrying a sand/salt mixture in your trunk to help melt snow and gain traction.
- The vehicle should also be stocked with items that would be beneficial if you were involved in a crash, or your vehicle became stuck. These items should include bottled water, blankets, non-perishable food items, a first aid kit and a flashlight with extra batteries.
- You should try to keep your

gas tank full, as this adds additional weight for traction in adverse conditions, and lessens the possibility of running out of fuel if you became stuck for a long period of time.

• Clean frost and snow off all windows, mirrors, and lights, and use your headlights to provide optimum visibility. Make sure the entire window is clear. Having only a small portion cleared could contribute to a crash if you don't see another vehicle. You could also be ticketed. Keep an old towel under the seat and periodically pull off to a safe location and wipe off your headlights and tail lights.

• Accelerate and brake gently, and increase following distance between you and other vehicles. Bad weather is an adverse driving condition and you should increase your following distance by one or two additional seconds (standard following distance for good weather is three seconds). Be particularly cautious on bridges and curves as they are often the slickest parts of the road.

- Steer in the direction you want to go if your vehicle loses traction and begins to slide.
- Allow for more time when traveling to and from work, home, school or other activities.
- Always wear your seat belt, and properly secure children in the proper safety seats.
- Have a plan for your children should they get sent home from school early.
- If you are involved in a traffic crash, or need assistance, call 911 or contact the Patrol at *47 from your cell phone. Call *KTA if you are on the Kansas Turnpike.

To find out road conditions, call 511 from a landline or cellular phone, or view conditions at: www.ksdot.org/offTransInfo/511info/511traffictavel.asp.

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