

Fourth of July creates one of busiest travel times

The Fourth of July holiday creates one of the busiest travel times on roads and highways in Kansas. Unfortunately, an increase in traffic increases the likelihood of traffic crashes, injuries and deaths.

The Kansas Department of Transportation travel information resources can help with planning your holiday or other summer travels and can keep you informed as you travel. Summer is the height of road construction and by planning ahead and using the free services available anytime, travelers can find out if their routes are impacted by road work and make other plans as needed. With weather updates provided every 15 minutes, Kansas

511 can also be a resource to help travelers learn about changing weather conditions.

KanDrive, www.kandrive.org, the department's traveler information gateway for Kansas and surrounding states, provides essential information you need to plan your trip. KanDrive features include camera images, motion camera views, an interactive 511 map of Kansas roads, road conditions and work zones and links to help full transportation resources, such as Kansas Turnpike information, Kansas Byways, weather information and metro traffic information. Much of the same information can be accessed by calling 5-1-1 from

anywhere in Kansas.

Camera snapshots of the roadway are updated every few minutes from closed-circuit cameras installed along I-170 and other highways. A camera tour is provided so travelers can select and see all camera images on a specified highway.

Motion camera links are also provided for many cameras along I-70 between Goodland and Auburn Road west of Topeka. These can be accessed by clicking on the camera icon and clicking on the "motion camera" link (if provided on that camera) beneath the lower right corner of the camera view. Still shots will be updated every two seconds.

Electronic sign message views show construction, accident and safety messages currently being displayed.

Metro Traffic Management Center websites — Traffic Management Centers in Kansas City (KC Scout) and Wichita (WICHway), use up-to-the minute information to provide travel speeds and camera views on select routes, posted messages on electronic signs and other helpful information for drivers. KanDrive provides links to KC Scout (www.kcscout.org) and WICHway (wich-way.org), the new Wichita metro website. A new link at the top of the 511 map page, "Metro Travel Sites" now provides drop down links to

metro traffic information for both of the sites.

RSS feeds and GeoRSS feeds have recently been added to the 511 map page (<http://511.ksdot.org>).

The 511 mobile site at <http://511mm.ksdot.org> provides map, camera and electronic message sign views, road conditions, work zone and event information and links to weather. The site is accessible from multiple devices, including iP-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.

511 Phone - From any phone anytime, travelers may call 5-1-1 from anywhere in Kansas or 1-866-511-5368 from anywhere in the U.S. to get route-specific road conditions, work zone information, including detours and closed roads, and travel-related weather information to plan their trips or for updates as they travel.

For everyone's safety, drivers should buckle up, safely secure children in safety seats and avoid distractions such as talking or texting on their cell phone.

Help plants cool themselves to prevent heat stress

The best way a plant owner can protect trees and shrubs against heat stress and related injury is to help the plants do a better job of cooling themselves.

"The only problem with that is: Heat isn't the only problem," said Jason Griffin, director of Kansas State Research and Extension's John C. Pair Horticulture Center.

Temperature does affect almost every physiological and biochemical process, he said. Each plant grows best in a particular temperature range. It also has a high and a low threshold for survival.

But, heat nearly always has partners in crime, Griffin explained. Moisture, wind, cloud cover and plant species can be just as important. Like heat, all four can affect how well plants' cooling system works.

"Another factor this year is that many central U.S. landscape plants are unusually vulnerable to any kind of damage," Griffin added. "They're still trying to recover from 2011's heat and drought."

Still, plant owners can take counter measures to help ornamentals through summer's searing days.

"You can directly affect the tem-

perature of a plant by shading it. Obviously, this is a labor-intensive step. But, I've seen people use everything from bed sheets to screening to umbrellas, in order to reduce the temperature of leaves. And, as ridiculous as this sounds ... it's worked," he said.

Occasionally misting foliage during the mid-afternoon can also help.

"Nurseries with overhead irrigation sometimes turn on the water for 5 minutes per hour through the day's peak heat. This lowers the air temperature surrounding the plants without overwatering," Griffin said.

Monitoring soil moisture is always a critical step.

"A plant can't cool itself without adequate soil moisture," he said. "At the same time, overwatering can shut down plants' cooling system as fast as drought can. Not enough and too much are both bad."

Griffin is in a position to know a lot about how plants respond to weather extremes. At the research center he directs, K-State tests everything from shade and ornamental trees to bedding and medicinal plants.

Plus, the John C. Pair Horticulture Center is located just outside Wichita. Last year that city broke a 75-year record for the most days in a single summer with temperatures above 100 degrees (a total of 53, reached Sept 1). And, although 2012 isn't shaping up as a repeat of 2011, plant owners can "rest assured that it will be hot," he said.

As often is the case, however, last year's heat wasn't an isolated event.

"When seasonal temperatures rise in Kansas, rain totals tend to drop," Griffin said. "Last year, though, they'd almost disappeared by August. Plus, the Kansas wind machine got fired up, drying things out and reducing our cloud cover."

"That four-part whammy greatly reduced plants' ability to tolerate the high temperatures. Wichita residents who actually lost a weeping willow or quaking aspen are probably giving some thought this year to replacing it with something like a Shumard oak."

The main way plants cope with heat is a process called transpiration, he said. Roots absorb water from the soil and send it up through their plant. Some of that water

then evaporates from the leaves through tiny pores, called stomata. The evaporating water cools each leaf much like evaporating sweat cools skin.

Griffin said, however, a variety of factors can limit or disrupt the transpiration process.

- Dry soil - reduces water availability. It also signals the leaves' stomata to close.

- Wind - shakes branches and leaves, causing stomata to close. Plus, wind blows away the thin layer of cool air around each leaf and often scatters potential cloud cover.

- Intense sunlight - plays a role in stomata closure and sends leaves' internal temperature above the surrounding air temperature.

"Each of those factors can take part in a complete breakdown of leaf cells. We may call the result 'heat scorch,' but it's a lot more than that," Griffin said.

Excessive heat makes things worse by upsetting the normal functions of internal plant cells. One of the first processes affected is photosynthesis - the way the plants make food.

"Many plants can recover from this upset overnight," Griffin said. "That only happens around here, though, if nighttime temperatures cool off. If they don't, plants have cumulative effects - carryover stress from one day to the next."

"I've seen well-established, well-acclimated plants make some

amazing recoveries from extreme weather events. Hot weather that hangs on, however, can be sort of insidious. Its impacts can build and then linger. So, you can't afford to let things slide when it comes to helping your most valuable trees and shrubs -- even for a day or two."

For the longer term, he recommended that homeowners shop for plants with good heat- and drought-resistance, plus take advantage of any microclimates in their yard that could provide wind and sun protection for more sensitive plants.

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