

Median Barriers Save Lives On Highways Statewide

POSTED: 6:13 pm EDT July 25, 2006
UPDATED: 11:08 pm EDT July 25, 2006

WAKE COUNTY, N.C. -- The driver of a Toyota recently crashed into a gasoline tanker truck, then rolled into the median. The only thing that stopped him from slamming into oncoming traffic was the median cable barrier. It's worked in saving many lives across North Carolina.

Safety engineers credit the state as the first to install a system of median cable barriers. Over 600 miles of Tar Heel highways have the steel safety devices.

"It gives as the car hits it, and basically re-directs the vehicle to a controlled stop," said Department of Transportation engineer Brian Murphy.

After 33 cross median fatalities in 1998, the DOT decided to spend \$120 million on median barriers. In seven years, crews put the barriers on every highway median smaller than 70 feet wide.

"If you look at the trends on these sections of highway before we put cable barriers and compare them to what we have now after we have the cable barrier in, we estimate that we've saved over 100 lives with our barrier systems," said Murphy.

While North Carolina is out in front as far as the middle of the road is concerned, engineers are trying to do even better. They've recently installed the next generation of median cable barriers on the Durham Freeway. The simple upgrade includes four cables instead of three.

The cable barriers aren't perfect. Cars can roll or flip over them in some cases. And once the cables are hit, they have to be repaired.

But as dozens of drivers across the state can attest, the barriers can be a lifesaver.

The Texas Transportation Institute said 27 other states are now following North Carolina's lead on installing median cable barriers.

Reporter: [Mark Roberts](#)
Photographer: [Terry Cantrell](#)
Online Editor: [Dana Franks](#)

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