



Kansas LTAP Fact Sheet

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Douglas County's End of Day Trivia

By Lisa Harris

Get the answer right, go home early.

Larry Wilson, assistant operations manager for Douglas County Public Works Department, mixes a little training and fun at the end of some of his crew's work days. As the crew gathers to close out the day (about 3:10 for a workday that ends at 3:30) he will convene a "trivia" session, asking questions related to road work and some "off topic"

questions to mix it up. He usually will give the crew members many opportunities to get the answer right, letting them know if they are getting closer to the right answer or not. The first person that says the right answer gets to go home early. It's a good way to share information and build morale.

Wilson started "trivia" more than a decade ago. He came up with the

idea when he realized that he himself did not know many of the basic facts about his county and road work that he thought he should know, like miles of gravel road, for example. Or the number of lane miles the county maintains. Or how many people are employed in the public works department. He said: "When I became a supervisor, and I still did not know some of those things; well,



Clockwise from top left, Larry Wilson reacts to an answer to a trivia question. Kyle French (back to camera) and Brandon French listen as Wilson asks a question. Gary Russell ponders an answer. Robin Wadkins, standing in the back, pitched in from the shop office. Pictured with Wadkins are, from left, Ethan Rudebush, Charles Lamont (back to camera), and Mark Guengerich.



then I really looked stupid.” So he started looking things up, and writing them down.

Pretty soon Wilson realized these same things would be good for his crew to know as well. So, every once in awhile they have a trivia session, usually on a Friday or a rainy day.

Wilson said everyone on the crew participates—“because who wouldn’t want to go home early?” But they don’t have to participate.

Wilson said the trivia sessions work well in sharing useful information and having a little fun, with no impact on the county or the crew. “No time is lost; the crew is done for the day. Everyone is gathered and waiting to go home,” he said. There’s no negative for an employee, either—no one is put on the spot. Everyone elects to play.

The employees don’t know the questions ahead of time, although some questions are repeated from previous trivia sessions. Wilson keeps hundreds of questions in a notebook, and adds to them.

The trivia questions have evolved over time. Wilson started with basic questions that he considers important to the job, and then he started mixing in other topics that are fun but not related to public works. See sidebar below for some examples of trivia questions.

“There’s no down side to doing this,” Wilson said. “It provides a teaching moment.” He has noticed



that when he repeats questions from past trivia sessions, if crew members don’t know the exact answer (like how many counties in Kansas have a county-township road system), they guess closer each time. Each trivia session has maybe 20 questions, give or take.

Wilson is quick to acknowledge that he has support for this activity. “I am real fortunate that my management lets me do this,” he said.

“The trivia exercise is a great idea,” said Douglas County public works director Keith Browning. “It helps the public’s perception of our department when employees know and can relate facts about the road system and the county in general. Having a well informed work force benefits everyone, and having a little fun at the same time can’t help but boost morale.”

Author’s note: I attended a trivia session on February 6 to see Wilson and his crew in action. It was great fun. There was a lot of camaraderie in the room—ribbing each other and cheering each other on. Wilson was kidded as well. Some winners swaggered out the door. There were many smiles and laughs. A lot of good information was shared, and all employees got to go home a little early—some earlier than others. What’s not to like about that?

Wilson is happy to talk with you about trivia and can be reached at (785) 979-0765. He might even give a trivia session at your location in exchange for a tour of your shop and a little travel money to get there.

How good are YOU at trivia? Try answering the questions below from Wilson off the top of your head. Turn to page 3 to see how you did. Have fun! ■

Some Examples of Trivia Questions

1. How far does the bottom of a stop sign need to be from the surface of a road?
2. How far in advance should a stop-ahead sign be installed from a stop sign?
3. What does “MUTCD” stand for and what does its name tell you about it?
4. How can you tell the difference between a Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3 barricade?
5. What is the end of a duck’s bill called?
6. What is the name of the ball on top of a flagpole?
7. How can you tell what color eggs a chicken will lay?
8. What year was the first Mustang made?



Across the top, from left, Kenny Kellum, Daryl Messer, Bruce Donaldson (seated), Alan Hollinger, and Mark Guengerich, participate in the trivia exercise.

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Photos by KUTC / L.Harris

Above, Ethan Rudebush smiles as he goes home early after answering a trivia question correctly.



Trivia answers from page 2: 1— 5 ft (7 ft in town); 2— 750 ft; 3— Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. A book that provides uniform standards and guidance for installing traffic control devices in the U.S.; 4— The number of boards: 1, 2 or 3; 5— A bean; 6— A truck; 7— By the color of its ears; 8— 1964.