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Safe Roads Illinois Presents Solutions to Stop Trucks From Entering Veterans Cemetery

In response to an increasing number of incidents involving trucks illegally entering Will County's Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery and running over the grave sites of deceased veterans, Safe Roads Illinois has proposed a series of measures designed to improve safety around the cemetery and keep trucks out.

"On top of the safety concerns associated with the truck traffic, the Village has a responsibility to maintain the respect and reverence our fallen heroes deserve," said Elwood Police Chief Fred Hayes. "It is simply unacceptable that these trucks disobey signs and illegally enter the cemetery and run over the sacred ground of those who have given so much in the service of our country. Maintaining safety for our citizens is our top priority, but maintaining respect for our honored veterans is of the utmost importance."

In January 2016 alone there were three separate instances where trucks illegally entered the veterans' cemetery at Route 53 and Hoff Road in an attempt to access the nearby intermodal facility. The most egregious of these incidents occurred on January 4 when a truck driver actually drove over grave sites in an attempt to turn around, desecrating the sacred burial ground.

The Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery has been forced to create a designated truck-turnaround on cemetery grounds because of how frequently trucks enter the cemetery, despite the "No Truck" signs.

In addition, many funeral-goers have trouble even getting to the cemetery due to increased truck traffic in the area. Funeral processions are frequently cut off by trucks attempting to access area warehouses and intermodals, making it impossible for family, friends, and other mourners to follow or keep up with the procession to the cemetery. As a result, these mourners frequently show up too late – or not at all – for the burials of their relatives and friends, missing their last moments before interment.

Chief Hayes is putting forth the following recommendations to Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) officials:

- Implement comprehensive signage system.
 - Problem: The state shut down Illinois' most dangerous rail crossing a year ago, but the closure does not appear on many GPS systems. As a result, many truckers have complained that they find themselves lost and searching for the nearest entry point into the intermodal facilities, often ending up in the cemetery or driving illegally on residential streets.
 - Solutions: 1) Employ a comprehensive signage system along Interstate 55, Interstate 80 and Route 53 to better inform drivers on how to legally access the intermodal facilities, avoiding residential streets and the cemetery entrance, which is not intended as a thoroughfare. 2) Post larger, better labeled signage at the entrance to the cemetery at Hoff Road to indicate that trucks are strictly prohibited from entering.
- Install overhead barrier/implement stiffer penalties.
 - Problem: Despite the fact that some drivers know that trucks are prohibited from entering the cemetery, drivers intentionally disobey the law and enter the cemetery illegally.

- Solutions: 1) Install an overhead barrier above the entrance to the cemetery, making it impossible for trucks to enter the cemetery; and 2) Work with state lawmakers and the Secretary of State's Office to increase penalties for drivers who run over grave sites or damage federal property.
- Decrease speed limits/Install temporary traffic light
 - Problem: Truckers cut off funeral processions of veterans, which in some cases can number up to 25 funerals per day, traveling to the cemetery.
 - Solutions: 1) Considering the funeral processions travel at speeds of 25 mph, lowering the limit along Route 53 would regulate traffic flow. It is recommended that the speed limits are reduced from 55 miles per hour to: 45 mph from Manhattan Road to Tehle Road; 35 mph from Tehle Road to Ed Schweitzer Road; and 45 mph from Ed Schweitzer Road to River Road; 2) Permanent traffic signals are slated to go up at the intersection leading into the cemetery once the high-speed rail is running but, in the meantime, IDOT should install a temporary light that runs across Route 53, which would reduce truck speeds.

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