

Construction Conferences Rock!

Construction, construction, what's your function?

This silly take on the old "Schoolhouse Rock" song would be suitable at INDOT this time of year, as district construction conferences and the Statewide Construction Conference (also called the Area Engineers Construction Conference) have been taking place since late January. Construction staffers have heard updates and details to help them plan for upcoming dirt-digging and related activities.

2023 AGENCY GOAL SPOTLIGHT
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The Fort Wayne District kicked off the statewide activities unusually; the Jan. 24-26 event was disrupted by a winter storm, so the final two days were postponed a week. Still, there was "snow chance" that the conference wouldn't be a success; informative INDOT speakers would ensure it.

More than 25 INDOT employees and a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) representative presented in Fort Wayne on topics such as construction management, concrete, Geotech, materials, and safety.

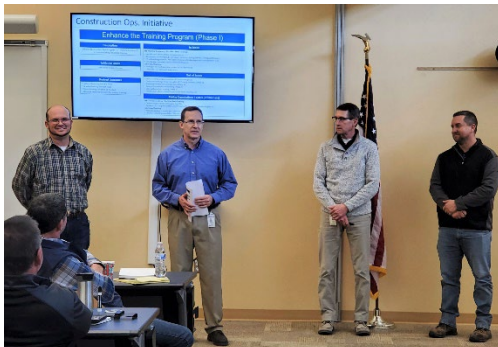
One focus was the ins and outs of mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) retaining walls, which are composite structures consisting of alternating layers of compacted backfill and soil reinforcement elements that are fixed to a wall face. They are economical alternatives to other wall types. But State Construction Engineer Joe Novak, Area Engineer Don Thornton, and FHWA Engineer (and former INDOT staffer) Ting Nahrwold noted that MSE walls are sensitive to installation; if constructed incorrectly, they are difficult to troubleshoot and costly to repair. Staffers learned how to better succeed when dealing with MSE walls.



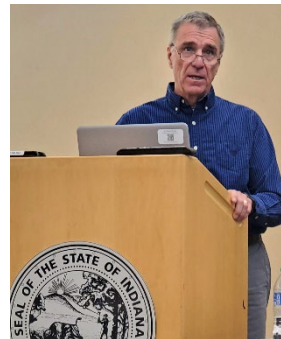
Fort Wayne District Construction Conference attendees gather during a break.

The Crawfordsville, LaPorte, and Statewide conferences followed suit in February; the Greenfield and Seymour conferences are slated for early and late March, respectively.

The Statewide Construction Conference covered hot topics in the construction program such as selling contracts at lettings, construction-related research, the use of liquidated damages provisions in contracts, constructability reviews, and proposed changes to the district Construction organizational model.



At the Statewide Construction Conference, Fort Wayne's Jason Spreen (from left in left photo), Central Office's Joe Novak and Kurt Pelz, and Vincennes' Andy Pinkstaff; Central Office's Greg Pankow (right photo).



Speakers included Commissioner Mike Smith, Deputy Commissioner of Construction Roland Fegan, and Chief Engineer of Construction Greg Pankow.

At all these INDOT conferences, it was abundantly clear that any agency staffer involved in Construction carries many important responsibilities.

“You’re all asked to perform a large variety of tasks,” said Novak at the Fort Wayne conference. “The variety makes it interesting but also makes it hard. You’re asked to know, or learn to do, all these tasks with success. Getting all this done is challenging but striving to do your best is appreciated.

“Technology and the world continue to get more sophisticated. Sophistication enables us to do different things, but we can’t be an expert in everything,” he said. “Here in INDOT’s Construction Division, Central Office and districts work together to help each other, so never be afraid to reach out.”