

'Scorpion' trucks rolling along Interstate 4

SGL demonstrates features of new Scorpion truck



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ALTAMONTE SPRINGS – The scorpions usually come out at night, spreading along Interstate 4 and nearby environs.

But instead of startling or stinging people with their venomous tails, these half dozen scorpions are customized, 23-foot-long trucks that weigh 33,000 pounds and cost \$130,000 apiece.

And unlike a real scorpion, construction crews deployed along the 21-mile stretch of I-4 that is being rebuilt are glad to see the trucks. One of their primary tasks is protecting workers from motorists who may be more interested in their cellphones than driving.

The scorpion trucks often are deployed behind a crew as they restripe the road, fill a pothole or remove debris. In that role, the truck hydraulically drops down a 14-foot attachment behind its back bumper to

act as a cushion in case it is struck from behind.

Called an attenuator, it acts like an accordion, designed to collapse while absorbing the blow of cars going as fast as 80 mph. It loosely resembles a tail like those sported by scorpions — thus the nickname.

David Feise, who manages the trucks and traffic maintenance on I-4, said the idea is to keep everybody as safe as possible.

"Nobody should have to die if they make a mistake," said Feise, who works for SGL Contractors, the consortium in charge of the \$2.3 billion highway overhaul.

Since arriving in Orlando in February, the trucks have not been run into or been involved in any accidents, said Feise, who added the goal is to maintain that record.

"Worker safety is what these trucks are designed for," he said.

Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Kim Montes said Feise and SGL associates are keeping I-4 about safe as it could be, especially considering the work is happening on a road that carries as many as 200,000 cars and trucks daily through downtown.

"It's gone a lot better than we thought it would," Montes said of the project that is supposed to be finished in 2021.

One of the prime duties of the scorpions is protecting workers when they are setting up lane shifts and closures, which are occurring as much as 40 times a week.

The trucks are configured so workers can stand in a well on either side to drop off or pick up cones, which typically weigh 12 pounds apiece. Workers also can work off the back of the truck.

The trucks, which are stored in Altamonte Springs, each have several cameras that allow the driver to view different angles of the road. The cameras also record images in case of an accident.

Along with providing crash protection and cone duties, much of the back deck of the truck can be cleared if cargo needs to be hauled.

Feise said other trucks offer many, but not all, of the options that the scorpions sport.

"We put a list together of all the challenges we had," recalled Feise. "We needed something specific for I-4."

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