

OH DEER!

Car-deer crash facts

The deer herd in this state is estimated at about 1.7 million. Car-deer crashes are a year-round problem in Michigan. During 2009, there were 61,486 reported car-deer crashes in this state. That translates into one car-deer crash every nine minutes.

These crashes are at least a \$130 million a year problem in this state. The average car-deer crash causes about \$2,100 in damage, usually to the front end, often leaving the vehicle undriveable.

Car-deer crashes are not only costly, they are deadly. In 2009, 10 persons were killed in crashes with deer. Another 1,571 were injured. The most serious crashes occur when motorists swerve to avoid a deer and hit another vehicle or fixed object, such as a tree.

Several factors are combining to make the car-deer crash problem grow. Urban growth spreading into deer habitat and a deer population that is four times higher than 1970 combine to force deer into smaller areas and into contact with people, often in collisions with vehicles.

More than half of all car-deer crashes occur in southern lower Michigan. In 2009, vehicle-deer crashes in our area were: Cass County (731), Berrien County (918), and St. Joseph County (678).

How to reduce your chance of a crash

Here are some tips to lessen your chances of being involved/injured in a car-deer crash:

- Stay aware, awake and sober.
- Remember car-deer crashes occur all year, but be especially alert in the spring and fall and at dusk and dawn.
- Pay attention to deer crossing and speed limit signs. They are placed at known deer crossing areas to alert you to the possible presence of deer.
- Deer collect in family groups of a mother and her fawns. If the doe has no fawns, she is usually solitary. Male bucks may live in groups of three or four individuals, except in mating season, when they are solitary. If you see one whitetail cross the road, chances are there will be more.
- Remember to always wear a safety belt. It is the best defense against injury in any roadway crash.

If a crash is unavoidable:

- Don't swerve. Brake firmly, stay in your lane, hold onto the steering wheel and bring your vehicle to a controlled stop.
- Pull off the road. Turn on your emergency flashers and be cautious of other traffic if you leave your vehicle.
- Don't attempt to remove a deer from the roadway, unless you are convinced it is dead. An injured deer's sharp hooves can easily hurt you.
- Report the crash to the nearest police agency and your insurance agent. Car-deer crashes are typically covered under the comprehensive portion of the insurance policy.
- Police or DNR conservation officers may issue you a permit if you want to keep the deer.

If you are on a motorcycle:

- Be alert for deer whenever they ride. Deer-vehicle crashes happen in urban, suburban and rural areas.
- Slow down. Decreasing speed gives a motorcyclist more time to spot an animal and react.
- Cover the brakes to reduce reaction time.
- Use high beam headlights and additional driving light when possible.
- If riding in a group, spread out riders in a staggered formation. If one rider hits a deer, this will lessen the chance that other riders will be involved.
- Wear protective gear at all times.

November is an especially dangerous time for deer-vehicle crashes. Deer are more likely to be crossing the roadways due to deer hunting season is open, farmers are harvesting their crops, and it is mating season for the deer. Call your insurance agent and review your vehicle coverages. You certainly do not want to find out you do not have comprehensive coverage on your vehicle after you hit a deer.