

Deer-Vehicle Collisions (October 2012)

Research has found that about 200 people a year in the United States die in crashes caused by darting deer. State Farm Insurance used its claims data to research the problem and estimated that deer hit 1.23 million vehicles between July 2011 and June 2012. Over the past four years, State Farm says, claims from deer hits rose nearly 8 percent, while claims from all other types of collisions fell 8.5 percent.

Part of the reason there's more deer accidents comes from the rising number of all kinds of accidents; as the economy starts to grow again, more people get back to commuting or driving longer distances. But the bigger factor comes from America's overpopulated deer herds, estimated at 20 million animals, which have grown even in states where thousands of hunters believe the second week of deer camp is the greatest time of year. Some critics say current hunting rules makes the problem worse by limiting does; others note that suburban sprawl means more deer have places to graze without natural predators where hunting isn't allowed.

Deer-vehicle collisions are three times more likely to occur in November than they are on any day between February 1st and August 31st. While more than 18 percent of all these collisions take place during November, October isn't far behind, followed by December.

Here are tips from the Insurance Information Institute on how to reduce the odds of a deer-vehicle confrontation involving your vehicle becoming part of the story we tell next year:

- Keep in mind that deer generally travel in herds – if you see one, there is a strong possibility others are nearby.
- Be aware of posted deer crossing signs. These are placed in active deer crossing areas.
- Remember that deer are most active between 6 and 9 p.m.
- Use high beam headlamps as much as possible at night to illuminate the areas from which deer will enter roadways.
- If a deer collision seems inevitable, attempting to swerve out of the way could cause you to lose control of your vehicle or place you in the path of an oncoming vehicle.
- Don't rely on car-mounted deer whistles.

