



Oh Deer! Time Change Means More Deer Collisions

Soon we'll return again to "standard time," when setting our clocks back an hour doesn't just mean winter is around the bend—it also means most of us are now commuting home in near or total darkness. You may not have thought about it, but this time of year, you're far more likely to be involved in a deer collision than any other time.

Why? There are two primary reasons. First, deer are more active between 5 and 10 p.m. in fall and early winter—a timeframe that includes peak commuter traffic hours—versus 8 p.m. to midnight in spring and summer. Second, deer are likewise more active in the fall, both looking for mates and seeking food before winter sets in. In addition, the deer population has been rising considerably in the last few decades. Combine heightened early evening activity with heavier commuter traffic, and the opportunity for a collision increases dramatically. In fact, according to the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), about 40% of all deer-car collisions occur during the months of October and November. In addition, researchers suspect that the common practice of "salting" the roads in winter weather further attracts deer to the roadside, both because deer like the salty taste, and the salt melts snow and exposes sought-after vegetation for the animals—but places them at greater risk.

As anyone who has been in one can attest, there are no winners in a car-deer collision. Driving a loaded car, at about 2,000 lbs., you're far more likely to survive than the deer, which average about 200 lbs. But even in your car, it's possible you could be injured, and your vehicle could sustain substantial damage in such an accident. So be on the lookout for these gentle creatures, especially during the next few months, and heed these tips from AAA to minimize the occurrence of collisions and the substantial damage they can cause:

- **Stay aware and alert.** Be on the watch for deer when they're likely to be out.
- **Slow down, heed road signs, and drive defensively.** Roads that cut between forests or brush, as well as valleys and farmland, are natural paths for deer. Watch for yellow 'Deer Crossing' signs, and slow down in these areas.
- **Always wear your safety belt and make sure your passengers do the same.**
- **Watch for deer.** In particular, watch for the reflection of their eyes or roadside movement. If you see one deer, slow down – they often travel in groups, and when one crosses the road, others will follow. Alert other drivers by flashing your brights or honking your horn. This will also encourage the deer to get out of the way.
- **Don't trust "deer deterrent" whistles.** Some companies have been marketing special low-frequency whistles that claim to alert the deer as your vehicle approaches. Recent studies indicate that these whistles have little to no impact, especially when combined with natural traffic noise.

- **Keep your brakes and tires in good repair.**
- **Remain in your lane.** This may be the hardest advice to follow. Don't swerve. According to AAA, the chances of serious injury are much greater when you swerve to avoid a deer, than if you actually hit one. Swerving into traffic or off the road simply are more dangerous, because these actions increase your chances of hitting another vehicle, a stationary object such as a tree or telephone pole, or the deer, that may be moving to get out of your way. Deer can accelerate from 0 to 30 mph in 1.5 seconds—so if you brake and hold your lane, it's quite possible the deer can get out of your way before you hit it.