

Be Aware of Animals

Each year, about 1.5 million animal-vehicle collisions cause about \$1 billion in damage, according to the Insurance Information Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). About 150 people die and another 10,000 are injured annually in such crashes.

When a deer or, in some northern states and Canada, a moose or elk meets up with a moving vehicle, there's on average about \$2,500 worth of property damage, though it can exceed \$10,000.

While animal-vehicle collisions can happen any time of year, fall is the peak season for deer-car accidents. That's mainly because autumn is both mating season and hunting season, so deer are more active and more likely to roam beyond their normal territory.

No foolproof way has been found to keep deer, moose and elk off highways and away from vehicles. Some motorists insist deer whistles have helped them avoid collisions. But the IIHS says there's no scientific evidence to support claims they prevent deer from approaching cars or reduce crash risk.

Perhaps a more promising approach is roadside reflectors, designed to reflect light from vehicle headlamps and cause deer to "freeze" rather than cross the road. Studies and field tests suggest they do reduce crash frequency to some extent.

You can prevent a collision with a deer, moose or elk. Here's how:

- Be aware of your surroundings. Pay attention to "deer crossing" signs. Scan down the road and far off to each side. At night, use your high-beam lights if possible to illuminate the road's edges. Be especially watchful in areas near woods and water. If you see one deer, there may be several others nearby.
- Be particularly alert at dusk and dawn when these animals venture out to feed.
- If you see a deer, moose or elk on or near the roadway and think you have time to avoid hitting it, reduce your speed, tap your brakes to warn other drivers and sound your horn. Deer tend to fixate on headlights, so flashing them may cause the animal to move. If there's no vehicle close behind you, brake hard.
- If a collision seems inevitable, don't swerve to avoid the animal; your risk of injury may be greater if you do. Maintain control of the vehicle. Report the accident to the police and your insurance company.
- Always obey the speed limit and wear safety belts.