



Darkness And Deer Can Create Driving Hazards

As summer turns into fall, daylight hours are reduced and deer become more active. Both of these can present driving hazards.

Night Driving

Why is night driving so dangerous? One answer is the darkness itself. According to the National Safety Council, 90 percent of a driver's reaction depends on vision – and vision is limited at night. Depth perception, color recognition and peripheral vision all are compromised after sundown. Older drivers especially have difficulties driving at night.

Another dangerous factor is fatigue. Drowsiness slows reaction times and because the body thinks of night as the time to rest, you may become increasingly groggy while driving at night.

Fortunately, you can take several steps to minimize the risks of driving at night. The council recommends the following:

- Prepare your vehicle for night driving. Clean headlights, tail lights, signal lights and windows at least once a week.
- Make sure your headlights are properly aimed. Misaimed headlights blind other drivers and reduce your ability to see the road.
- Reduce your speed and increase your following distance. Judging the speed and distance of other vehicles is more difficult at night than during the day.
- Don't overdrive your headlights. You should be able to stop in the illuminated area.
- When following another vehicle, keep your low beam headlights on so you don't blind drivers ahead of you.
- If an oncoming vehicle doesn't lower its beams from high to low, avoid glare by watching the right edge of the road and using it as your guide.
- Don't ever drink and drive. Alcohol impairs your driving ability and also acts as a depressant that may lead to fatigue.
- Avoid smoking while driving. Smoke's nicotine and carbon monoxide hamper night vision.
- If you're too tired to drive any farther, stop and rest awhile.
- Observe nighttime driving rules as soon as the sun goes down. Early evening can be one of the most difficult times to drive.

Deer Crossing

While November is the month with the highest risk for a vehicle-deer collision, such accidents can happen any time of the year, and the effects can be costly.

Approximately 200 people die each year from collisions with deer, and the economic cost to Americans is more than \$1 billion annually. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that about 275,000 motor vehicle crashes involving an animal occurred in 2005.

Department of Transportation officials in eight states want those numbers to go down. The newly formed Deer-Vehicle Crash Information Research Center Pooled Fund Project is headed by a committee of officials from Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio and Wisconsin. The goal is to identify, prioritize and guide research aimed at reducing deer-vehicle crashes.



DOT offers the following tips to help avoid vehicle-deer collisions:

- Slow down and prepare to stop as soon as you see a deer. Stopping your vehicle is safer than taking evasive action. Also, slow down if other cars are behaving differently.
- When you spot a deer, watch for more. Deer frequently travel in groups.
- Know that deer are nocturnal and often travel at dawn and at dusk. Many deer-vehicle crashes occur between 6 p.m. and 12 a.m.
- When driving at night, watch for reflections from your headlights. Deer eyes may reflect the light, and spotting the reflection could give you more reaction time. Use your bright lights when no traffic is approaching.
- For maximum safety, assume deer will cross your path.
- Do not swerve into another lane to avoid striking a deer. It is better to strike a deer than another vehicle or a fixed object.
- If you hit a deer, call 911 and wait for assistance from law enforcement personnel.

*Copyright 2007 * National Safety Council * All Rights Reserved.*