

## **Deer vs. Auto Statistics**

The National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently conducted a study concerning the increasing dangers from deer-related vehicle accidents. Deer-related car accidents have consistently risen over the years due to increasing deer populations and destruction of their habitat.

- There are **approximately 1.5 million deer-related car accidents annually**
  - The cost of these accidents results in over \$1 billion dollars in vehicle damage
  - There are around **175-200 fatalities every year** and over 10,000 injuries
  - The majority of these accidents occur between October and December, but can happen year round
- ❖ *In 2015, Utah Counties Indemnity Pool Members experienced 29 Animal vs. Vehicle accidents resulting in nearly \$120,000 worth of Property Damage, Deductibles Paid & Medical Bills.*

## **PREVENTING AND MINIMIZING THE RISK OF HITTING A DEER**

Deer can appear suddenly and without warning, but knowing how to react and where and when they are most likely to strike can greatly reduce your chances of being involved in an accident. Here are a few helpful tips to keep in mind as you travel in deer and elk country.

**Stay alert.** Scan down the road and off to each side. Be especially watchful in areas near woods and water as well as areas where roads divide agricultural fields from forestland. If you see one deer, there are probably several others nearby.

**Deer crossing signs are there for a reason.** Pay attention to posted deer crossing signs. These signs are placed in areas known for high deer traffic. It is significant to note that even if there is no posted deer crossing sign it is important to remain vigilant as deer may appear anywhere.

**Be especially vigilant during peak season.** Though collisions can happen any time of year, October, November and December are peak months for deer-auto accidents because it's both hunting and mating seasons, forcing deer to roam outside their normal territory. Especially in Utah, Deer, Elk & Moose will migrate to lower elevations to feed in their winter range and this move will bring more deer and other large animals closer to roadways and drivers.

**Use headlights wisely.** At night, use high-beams when possible to illuminate the road's edges. If you see a deer far ahead, flick the brights on and off multiple times. Deer tend to fixate on headlights, so flashing them may cause the animal to scurry away. Make sure to use your high beams only when no other oncoming traffic is visible and make sure to turn them off if a vehicle approaches.

**Watch out at mealtime.** Pay particular attention between dusk and dawn, when these animals usually venture out to eat. While deer can be active any time of the day, the majority of deer-related car accidents occur starting at dusk and during the evening. It is important to pay special attention during 6:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M. It is also important to always be aware that

deer mostly move in groups or herds, and that when you spot one deer, it is likely that there are more deer nearby.

**Brake as necessary.** If you think you have time to avoid hitting the animal, reduce speed, tap the brakes to warn drivers behind you, and sound your horn. If there's no vehicle close behind you, brake hard.

**Don't swerve.** If a collision seems inevitable, don't veer off to avoid the animal. Your risk of injury may be greater if you do. Maintain control of the vehicle. The leading cause of accidents, injuries, and deaths from deer-related accidents is when vehicles swerve in an attempt to avoid hitting a deer. Swerving can result in vehicles moving into oncoming traffic, crashing into trees and other objects, or even rolling over. While it may be against a driver's first instinct, the safest thing to do is slow down as much as possible and let your vehicle strike the deer. Instincts tell us to avoid an obstruction in the road, but if you can train yourself to not swerve to avoid deer in the road you will keep yourself, your passengers, and other drivers much safer.

**Always obey speed limits and wear seat belts.** Wearing your seat belt, obeying the speed limit and practicing defensive driving tactics could make a significant difference.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU HIT A DEER

**Move your vehicle to a safe place.** If possible, pull over to the side of the road, and turn on your hazard lights. If you must leave your vehicle, stay off the road and out of the way of any oncoming vehicles. Deer are most active at dusk and dawn—times when you or your vehicle may be less visible to other motorists.

**Call the police.** Alert authorities if the deer is blocking traffic and creating a threat for other drivers. If the collision results in injury or property damage, you will need to fill out an official report. This report also can prove useful when filing your claim with UCIP.

**Document the incident.** Take photographs of the roadway, your surroundings, damage to your vehicle, and any injuries you or your passengers sustained. (Take plenty of photos: This may help make your claim easier to process.) If witnesses stop, take down their account of what occurred, and ask for their contact information. Utilize the UCIP Accident Reporting Kit.

**Stay away from the animal.** A frightened, wounded deer could use its powerful legs and sharp hooves to harm you.

**Don't assume your vehicle is safe to drive.** Double-check that your car is drivable after colliding with a deer. Look for leaking fluid, loose parts, tire damage, broken lights, a hood that won't latch and other safety hazards. If your vehicle seems unsafe in any way, call for a tow.