

INSURANCE COUNCIL OF TEXAS

service, information, and representation for the property and casualty insurance industry

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Motorists Beware – Deer on the Road

The next few weeks are one of the most dangerous times of the year for motor vehicle collisions involving deer, an insurance industry spokesman said.

The highest number of auto accidents involving deer traditionally occur in November, making this a hazardous situation for motorists traveling around the state, according to Mark Hanna, a spokesman for the Insurance Council of Texas.

“Statistics show that the majority of deer/vehicle accidents in Texas occur during the fall of the year,” Hanna continued. “Behavioral changes, especially the increased activity associated with the rut or mating season, archery season (Sept. 26 – Oct. 26) and the general hunting season, which begins in most counties on Saturday, November 1, all play a role in deer moving across our highways.”

According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, 15 people were killed and more than 1,500 people were injured in motor vehicle collisions with animals in 2000.

In Llano County, described as the deer capital of Texas, Llano County Chief Deputy John Keith said the rut, which coincides with the start of deer season, put the animals on the move. Keith said the collisions between deer and motorists occur both day and night, making it a dangerous situation for drivers.

L. David Sinclair, director of Wildlife Enforcement for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, said drivers must use extra caution while driving at night where deer are plentiful. “It’s just harder for motorists to see deer at night, thus the greater chance of hitting a deer that may dart onto the roadway,” Sinclair said.

Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. John Stafford of Kerrville said motorists kill at least one deer every day on Highway 16 between Kerrville and Fredricksburg.

“It happens so frequently in this area that about half of the accidents are not reported to law enforcement,” Stafford said. “The locals just call their insurance agent the next day and explain what happened. The agent tells them to go get it fixed.”

Comprehensive insurance coverage will pay for the cost of fixing or replacing your vehicle after the accident, minus your deductible.

Eddie Overstreet, owner of the Economy Body and Paint Shop in Llano, has been repairing vehicles in Llano since 1969.

“The average collision with a deer runs around \$1,500. That’s for light damage to the vehicle’s grill, radiator, hood, fender and lights,” Overstreet said. “Most trucks fare better in a collision with a deer, but the damage cost-wise is about the same.”

Overstreet said deer often run into the side of vehicles and through front windshields causing much more damage.

Sgt. Stafford said the best way to avoid hitting a deer is to beware that they are there. “Be watching for them. If you see one, slow down,” Stafford said.

Most importantly, Stafford said don’t swerve to miss a deer. “Brake and hold your steering wheel,” Stafford said. “More people suffer serious injuries from trying to avoid hitting deer than having the actual collision with a deer.”

If you hit a deer, law enforcement officials recommend that you pull off the roadway and contact law enforcement authorities to make an accident report.

The following list of safety tips are recommended by the Insurance Council of Texas to help reduce the number of deer-related accidents:

- Deer activity is highest during the dusk and dawn periods. Drivers should be particularly alert in the early morning and evening.
- Motorists should drive defensively when approaching wooded draws or creek bottoms that intersect highways, especially in agricultural settings.
- Newly constructed roads through deer habitat often have a rash of deer/vehicle accidents. Be on the lookout.
- Highway traffic signs indicating deer crossings should be a clear reminder to all motorists to use extreme caution in these areas especially during the early morning and evening hours.
- Drivers are advised to scan roadways for deer; if at night, motorists should look for deer eye reflections. Passengers can help “keep an eye out for deer.”
- Deer are often dazed or confused by vehicle headlights. When a deer is spotted, drivers should reduce speed but maintain control. Use emergency flashers or pump the brakes to alert vehicles approaching from behind.

- If a deer is observed crossing the road, reduce speed. Deer are social animals and often travel in family groups, so it is likely that others will follow.
- Most severe deer-related accidents result when loss of control occurs while trying to avoid a deer. Maintaining control of the vehicle is essential. It is recommended that a driver steer straight rather than risk losing control and colliding with oncoming traffic or hitting objects off the road.

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The Insurance Council of Texas is a multi-purpose, non-profit trade association consisting of more than 400 property and casualty insurers writing business in Texas.

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