



AAA Mid-Atlantic News Release

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LOVE-STRUCK DEER RISK BEING CAR-STRUCK

AAA offers tips to avoid collisions with animals In year's most dangerous quarter

WASHINGTON, DC (October 17, 2003) – Deer and drivers are entering the riskiest season for collisions with each other, AAA Mid-Atlantic warned today. More than 60 percent of crashes in the Washington area occur from October through January, when deer populations are on the move across busy roads – first during their mating season, and then foraging for food and shelter.

Nationwide, 200 people die each year in some 725,000 collisions. More than 29,000 people are injured as a result, and hundreds of thousands of deer die on the road or of their injuries. The total cost in car repairs tops \$1 billion.

“The situation is getting worse each year – as drivers realize every time autumn rolls around,” said Deborah DeYoung, a spokeswoman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. “More cars are on the roads and more deer are forced to cross them as their habitat shrinks. That makes area rush hours – the same dawn and dusk times when the animals usually are on the move – potentially deadly for drivers and animals alike.” To avoid deer, AAA Mid-Atlantic offers the following tips:

- Deer make driving dangerous even on residential and city streets. To protect them, your passengers, and yourself, drive defensively:
 - Buckle up. Your odds of walking away from a collision with a deer improve dramatically if you and all your passengers are wearing seat belts.
 - Slow down! Driving at or below the speed limit improves your chances at stopping safely if a deer runs in front of you. If you do hit a deer, the slower speed will reduce the likelihood of seriously injuring yourself and your passengers.
- Don't rely on deer whistles, deer fences, or other gadgets -- they don't work. Instead:
 - Pay extra attention during the pre-dawn and dusk hours, especially during the fall mating season. Use your high beams, and watch for the reflection of deer's eyes and their silhouettes on the shoulders of roads.

- Take note of deer-crossing signs, which indicate areas of frequent deer movement. They're not placed arbitrarily. And stay alert for deer near forested areas and farmland, especially when farmers are harvesting.
- Scan the road for deer. If you spot deer near the edge of the road, slow down to prepare for their unpredictable movements.
- If you see one deer, slow down and keep your eyes focused for more as they tend to travel single file in small herds. And remember the exact spot where you saw a deer cross the road. They are creatures of habit and often use the same paths again.
- If it becomes clear that you won't be able to avoid colliding with a deer, drive to survive:
 - Don't swerve. Few drivers die or are seriously injured in a collision with a deer – except when they try to dodge it, and veer into oncoming traffic, a tree, or off the road.
 - Brake until the last fraction of a second before impact, then let off your brakes. This will cause the front end of your car to rise, increasing the odds that the struck deer will pass underneath your car, instead of being launched into your windshield and seriously injuring you or your passengers.
 - If you do strike a deer, do not touch it or try to move it yourself. Despite your kind intentions, an injured deer might panic and startle or injure you. Call police or other authorities for assistance.

According to Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the number of accidents known to involve deer increased by 22 percent between 1990 and 2000. The number of injuries jumped nearly 70 percent. Fairfax County Police's 2002 records offer a snapshot of the problem in the Washington, DC region:

- 47 percent of car-deer collisions in 2002 occurred between 5 and 9 p.m., and another 20 percent between 5 and 9 a.m.;
- 84 percent of collisions occurred at speeds of 35 miles per hour or more;
- 67 percent of deer struck the front of the car, 22 percent struck the left side, and 11 percent struck the right side; and
- The average damage to cars was more than \$2,200.

AAA Mid-Atlantic serves 3.7 million members in Washington, DC; Maryland; Virginia; Delaware; Pennsylvania; and New Jersey.