

Fatalities On The Rise In Vehicle-Animal Crashes

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<?xml version="1.0"?> Fatalities on the rise in vehicle-animal crashes FREDERIC J. FROMMER Associated Press
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WASHINGTON_Fatalities from vehicle crashes with deer and other animals have more than doubled over the last 15 years, according to a new study by an auto insurance-funded highway safety group that cites urban sprawl overlapping into deer habitat.

The report by the Highway Loss Data Institute found that 223 people died in animal-vehicle crashes last year, up from 150 in 2000 and 101 in 1993.

Since 1993, Texas had the most deaths from such crashes, with 227, followed by Wisconsin with 123 and Pennsylvania with 112.

The Highway Loss Data Institute and its sister organization, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, looked at both insurance claims and federal crash data. According to the report, most accidents involving animals are with deer.

"Urban sprawl means suburbia and deer habitat intersect in many parts of the country," said Kim Hazelbaker, the Highway Loss Data Institute's senior vice president. "If you're driving in areas where deer are prevalent, the caution flag is out, especially in November."

The study found that insurance claims for crashes with animals is three times higher in November than it is from January to September.

"The months with the most crash deaths coincide with fall breeding season," said Anne McCartt, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's senior vice president for research.

The Governors Highway Safety Association cautioned that the numbers need to be looked at in context, citing the more than 12,000 drunk driving deaths each year.

"Deer crashes are a small highway safety problem in terms of total deaths," said the group's spokesman, Jonathan Adkins. "This problem is perceived to be a lot more common than the reality."

Adkins said there are no proven countermeasures, other than fencing, "which is extremely expensive and not practical. Our message to motorists is to slow down, particularly at dusk and on rural roads."

In 2004 study, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that fencing, combined with underpasses and overpasses, can be an effective way to prevent deer-vehicles crashes.

As to the size of the problem, McCartt said, "I agree that the number doesn't compare to the number of people killed in alcohol-related crashes, but it is going up. We're not suggesting it's of the same magnitude, but they do result in injuries and death."

The overall number of animal-vehicle crashes is also on the rise. The report says that State Farm Insurance Co., the nation's largest car insurer, has estimated 1.2 million claims industrywide for crashes with animals over a 12-month period ending June 30 of this year. State Farm says that claims for those types of crashes have increased nearly 15 percent over the last five years.

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