

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Public information and education, combined with engineering and herd reduction activities, is generally acknowledged as a key component to a comprehensive DVC reduction program. Unfortunately, similar to other driver education programs, proving the crash reduction impact of particular informational campaigns is difficult. No experimental research that attempted to directly connect specific public information and education campaigns with a resultant DVC reduction or potential reduction was found. These results can be approximated with driver behavior surveys, but educational programs are often evaluated by the long-term tracking of the crash experience of comparable individuals. The following paragraphs summarize the typical content of DVC-related public information and education materials, and several links to examples are provided.

DVC Reduction Public Information and Education Campaigns

A number of public and non-governmental organizations distribute DVC and DVC-avoidance educational material to the general public. Sometimes there is even more than one organization within a particular jurisdiction that releases this type of information. The material is typically distributed and made available to the media and public in the form of press releases, brochures, posters, videos, and/or webpages.

DVC Significance

Typically, there are two objectives to DVC reduction public information and education material. First, the significance of the DVC problem in the jurisdiction of interest is described and clearly shown. This type of information can be communicated through a number of forms:

- Charts of total annual DVCs for a number of years, and possibly facts related to DVCs per second;
- Map-based plots of DVC locations (for particular segments);
- Plots of when DVCs occur during the day and year;

- Total and average estimated DVC cost, property damage crashes, injury crashes, and fatal crashes; and
- A graphic that indicates the typical size of a human, car, and deer.

The map-based color-coded plots of DVC locations (crash total, rate, etc.) anecdotally appear to be of particular value. These plots have different colors at particular locations or along roadway segments that indicate a different number or rate of DVCs. For example, the color red might indicate a higher range of DVCs occurring along a one-mile roadway segment than the color yellow. These plots are typically based on one or three years of data. The plots appear to be used by the general public to identify general areas in which extra care in driving might be needed. However, not all states or jurisdictions are capable of easily creating this type of graphic.

DVC Avoidance

The second portion of most DVC-related public information and education material involves a series of suggestions typically referred to as “driver tips”. The objective of this information is to assist the driver with their actions if a deer should appear on the side of the roadway. The “driver tips” for DVC avoidance typical include all or some of the following:

- Be alert for white-tailed deer all the time, but especially during dusk/dawn and/or Fall/Spring;
- Drive within your headlights and/or reduce your speed at night;
- If you see one white-tailed deer you should expect others;
- Stay on the road and hit the animal rather than leaving the roadway and colliding with a roadside object or crossing the centerline;
- Expect more white-tailed deer near deer crossing warning signs because they should be installed where this is true;
- Some suggest beeping your horn and/or flashing your headlights, but others suggest that focusing on other driving tasks at that time is more important; and

- Other suggestions: search and scan the roadway/roadside ahead, keep your windshield clean, buckle up, stay sober, and keep your headlights adjusted, and use your high beams where possible.

Some of the public information and education material reviewed also included information and/or graphics about how long it takes for a vehicle to stop at different speeds. This information was typically included to show the impact that speed choice may have on the possibility of being involved with a DVC. As indicated above, DVC reduction information campaigns often suggest a reduction in vehicle speed to allow more reaction time to a roadside white-tailed deer. Research about the quantitative impacts of reductions in posted speed limits (which may be related to operating speed) is discussed in the “Speed Limit Reduction” summary portion of this toolbox.

What a driver should do after a DVC has occurred is also sometimes addressed in the “driver tips” portion of a DVC reduction public information and education campaign. Some of the suggestions that are provided by the Michigan Deer Crash Coalition include the following:

- Don’t swerve, brake firmly, stay in your lane, hold onto the steering wheel, and bring your vehicle to a controlled stop.
- Pull off the roadway. Turn on the vehicle hazard flashers, and be careful of other traffic when you leave your car.
- Don’t attempt to remove white-tailed deer from roadway unless you’re convinced it’s dead. An injured white-tailed deer can cause serious injury.
- Report the crash to nearest police agency and your insurance company (DVCs are usually covered under the comprehensive portion of your policy and shouldn’t increase your rates)
- If feasible, a possession permit from a police or DNR conservation officer may be issued if you want to keep the white-tailed deer. If not, there are a number of charities to which it might be donated.

Conclusions

A combination of some or all of the information described above is typically included in a DVC reduction and/or avoidance public information and education campaign. This information is typically released in the Fall (a peak DVC time period), and sometimes in the Spring (the second highest peak DVC time period during a year). The DVC-reduction impact of this information has not been studied, but it is generally acknowledged that education, along with engineering methodologies and herd size reduction activities, are key components to a comprehensive program addressing the DVC issue. The limited amount of information available about the DVC-reduction capabilities of almost all the countermeasures reviewed in this toolbox also make a public information and education campaign important. It also does not appear that any one of the DVC countermeasures reviewed would ever be completely effective, and public information and education campaigns will always be necessary.

As indicated, a large number of jurisdictions distribute DVC-related information. Four webpage addresses are listed below for examples of what can be accomplished:

- <http://www.deercrash.com/releases.htm>
- <http://www.dps.state.ia.us/deercrashes/>
- <http://www.state.me.us/mdot/safety-programs/maine-crash-data.php>
- <http://www.semcog.org/TranPlan/TrafficSafety/MDCC/index.htm>