



New Deer Crash Clearinghouse Looks at Research and Cautions Drivers October 2001

For thousands of years, October in North America has meant the beginning of the mating season for the native white-tailed deer. Today this seasonal increase in deer activity means heightened danger for motorists. Approximately 720,000 deer-vehicle collisions are thought to occur in the U.S. each year, with a high percentage between October 1 and December 31.

The annual number of deer-vehicle collisions in just five states in the Upper Midwest is estimated at more than 130,000, due in part to large deer herds combined with increased land development and a growing number of cars, trucks and motorcycles traveling more and more miles.

Investigators at the new Deer-Vehicle Crash Information Clearinghouse in Madison, Wisconsin are looking at ways to reduce the number and severity of these collisions. They are critically evaluating deer-crash data collection methods and research on countermeasures. The hope is that dissemination of this information will contribute to making the roads safer for both drivers and deer. The Clearinghouse, supported by the Wisconsin Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources, is part of the Midwest Regional University Transportation Center at the University of Wisconsin.

“We launched the Clearinghouse as a regional effort,” says Center Director Ernie Wittwer, “because the five states involved—Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota—all share the same problem: growing numbers of deer-vehicle collisions that are extremely costly in terms of property damage, injuries and even deaths.”

White-tailed deer are an ecological and economic resource for the region and nation, contributing billions of dollars in benefits to the economy through the expenditures of hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts. The goal of the new Clearinghouse is to minimize the accompanying negative effects of deer crashes on our highways through sharing of information, new technologies and crash reduction strategies.

“I am extremely enthused about this project,” says Professor Keith Knapp, director of the Clearinghouse and principal investigator. “We have assembled a strong technical advisory group of ecology and traffic safety experts from the five states. Our team of investigators is already combing the literature and the Internet for current research and successful strategies. We’re looking at everything from motion detectors, deer crossings and roadside vegetation to fences and reflectors.”

Results of the literature review and evaluation of countermeasure research will be put on the soon-to-be-launched Web site of the Clearinghouse. “We want to get a dialogue started—with traffic safety and deer ecology professionals and with interested citizens,” says Knapp. “Our first task is to try to get everybody on the same page in terms of the scope of the problem. Everyone has different criteria for counting deer-vehicle collisions, and many go unreported.”

The accompanying *Midwest Deer-Vehicle Crash Facts* highlights the scope of the challenge. There are an estimated five million deer in the region and over 130,000 *reported* deer-vehicle collisions every year. The annual number of injuries in the five states from deer crashes is estimated at more than 4,000. Damage to vehicles in the region is thought to be higher than \$200 million annually.

There is much, however, that drivers can do to protect themselves and their passengers. The Clearinghouse recommends that motorists follow the enclosed *Driver Tips for Avoiding Deer* to minimize their risk of a collision: Be especially alert in the high deer activity seasons of fall and spring and during low-light hours between dusk and dawn. Slow down and look for deer at deer crossing signs and drive defensively when deer are spotted. If a deer is in your path, use your brakes rather than swerving and risking a crash into another vehicle.

For more information about the Clearinghouse, contact Professor Keith Knapp at deercrsh@cae.wisc.edu.