

Should you just hit the deer?

The approximate 1.25 million accidents involving white-tailed deer result in about 150 human fatalities, more than 10,000 injuries, and insurance payouts approaching \$4 billion.

For those who don't hunt, the one time they are most likely to experience a close encounter with a deer is when they get on the road.

One officer explained how he handles a call to a deer accident. His first priority is always to ensure that no further crashes occur. When he arrives on the scene, he looks for vehicles or debris obstructing the roadway. Then he positions his car with its emergency lights on. If the vehicle is not blocking the road, he will try to immediately remove any obstructions.

He then talks with the driver, checking for injuries and sizing up the situation. He might need to move the driver and passengers to a safer location before calling for an ambulance or tow truck, if necessary.

Assuming everyone's unharmed, the next question he'll ask is about the deer. If it's injured but still alive, it will need to be euthanized—not just to end its suffering, but also to make sure it doesn't get back up and stumble out into traffic.

Even when a deer is dead and safely off in the ditch, roadkill is the gift that keeps on giving. Occasionally, another wreck happens when someone stops to saw the antlers off a roadkill buck.

If vehicles at the crash site are badly damaged, officers will work the accident in the usual way. If the accident has resulted in a fatality, a DPS trooper will be called. However if it is only a one car accident with no injuries, drivers are usually given a "blue form" for their insurance company.

Listed below are tips to help you avoid connecting with a deer on the road.

- * If you see a deer in the roadway, don't swerve. Hit it. Cars can be fixed or replaced. As long as no one's tailgating you, hit the brakes. But if you can't do that, then hit the deer. If you swerve, chances are good that you'll lose control and slam into a tree, veer into oncoming traffic, or hit the ditch and roll your vehicle. If you have time to stop, then stop. But don't swerve and risk your neck over a deer.

- * Adjust your headrest so it's at the right height to prevent whiplash.

- * Maintain your lights, brakes, and tires so you can see, be seen, and stop.

- * Wear your seat belt, don't tailgate, and slow down.

- * When you're driving, drive. At deer crashes, and at a lot of other crashes, too, the number one excuse is 'I wasn't paying attention.'

- * Be especially attentive at dawn and dusk. If you see one deer crossing the road, slow

down. Deer often travel in herds. Just when you've seen one and avoided it, one or two more could be following it out onto the pavement. During the rut, a lone doe could be followed by a buck in hot pursuit. With their thoughts elsewhere, neither will remember to look both ways before crossing the road.

And those little plastic deer whistles so many drivers stick on their front bumpers? It turns out most of them don't actually make the sound they're supposed to make. Even if they did, deer couldn't hear it. And even if they could, they wouldn't notice or care.

Remember your car is just a vehicle, a tool to get you from point A to point B. It's insured. You're worth more than a deer or a car. Your car can be fixed. Your neck can't.



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