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School Resource Officer
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When Bumpers Meet Antlers

You see him standing on one side of the road. You wonder, *will he stay where he is or will he bolt in front of my vehicle?* The closer you get to him, the more anxious he looks. Then, like a bullet, he runs in front of you. You hit your breaks and watch as his white tail waves good-bye to you. Then there is a terrible "Thump" and crash of glass to your right. Your eyes automatically jerk to the right, an involuntary muscle reaction. Your expression is one of horror as a four point buck looks affectionately into your eyes, his head protruding through the shattered glass of the passenger side window of your vehicle.

Big, brown, furry beasts sometimes emerge from the wilderness to cross a public road - usually in groups. Unfortunately, no one taught them to look both ways first.

Too often, the result is a motorist's nightmare: a collision with a deer or - if you are further North - an elk or a moose. The animal usually comes out second best in this type of close encounter, but the toll on vehicles and their occupants can also be substantial.

Each year, about 500,000 animal vehicle collisions cause about \$1 billion in damage, the Insurance Information Institute estimates. And about 100 people die and another 9,000 are injured annually in such crashes, says the National Safety Council.

When a deer - or, in some northern states and Canada, a moose or an elk - meet up with a moving vehicle, there's typically about \$2,000 worth of property damage, though it can run as high as \$8,000. Deer usually cause damage to the front bumper, grille, headlamps, hood and fender areas; sometimes the windshield is broken and airbags deploy. A moose, being larger, usually breaks the windshield and may crash the roof.

While animal/vehicle collisions can happen any time of the year, fall is the peak season for deer/car accidents (and a peak time - mid May through July - for moose/car wrecks as well). That's mainly because autumn is both the mating season and hunting season, so deer are more active and more likely to roam beyond their normal territory.

No foolproof way has been found to keep deer, elk, or moose off highways and away from vehicles. One promising approach is roadside reflectors, designed to reflect light from vehicle headlamps and cause deer to "freeze" rather than cross the road. Studies and field tests suggest they do reduce crash frequency to some extent.

So, what do we do?

Be aware of your surroundings. Pay attention to "Deer Crossing" signs. Look well down the road and far off to each side. At night, use your high-beam lights, if possible, to illuminate the road's edges. Be especially watchful in areas near woods and water. If you see one deer, there are probably several others nearby, and they will follow one another - even if it means hitting your vehicle in the process.

Be particularly alert at dusk and dawn, when these animals venture out to feed. If you see a deer on or near the roadway and think you have time to avoid hitting it, reduce your speed, tap your breaks to warn other drivers, and sound your horn. Deer tend to fixate on headlights, so flashing them may cause the animal to move. If there's no vehicle close to you, break hard.

Remember, autumn is the peak time for these types of accidents. If a collision seems inevitable, don't swerve to avoid the animal: your risk of injury may be greater if you do. Hit the animal, but control the vehicle. As soon as possible, report the accident to police. Always obey the speed limit and wear safety belts. Please drive carefully. The lives of you and your children may depend on it.

This information is furnished as a part of the Anderson County Sheriff's Office-School Resource Officer-Parent and Student Education Program (PASEP). Questions concerning this article or other topics may be referred to any SRO or by calling 457-2414 and leaving a message for the SRO Supervisor. Some of the information was researched from materials provided by the Farm Insurance Companies.