

Drive defensively during deer season

Although deer population numbers might be down nationwide, there's still a need to be vigilant while driving this fall, according to Sandy Praeger, Commissioner of Insurance.

A report from State Farm Insurance, using Federal Highway Administration data, said that deer numbers are down 3.5 percent overall in the United States from the year before, but the average claims cost for vehicle-deer accidents has increased.

"The reality of driving on Kansas roads and highways this time of year is the possible encounter with a deer," Commissioner Praeger said. "And that encounter could result in costly vehicle repairs."

The average property damage from a deer-vehicle collision is estimated at \$3,414, a 3.3 percent increase from a year earlier, according to the State Farm study. The top five states where a driver is most likely to hit a deer are West Virginia, Montana, Iowa, South Dakota and Pennsylvania.

Mid-fall and mid-spring are likely times of the year for deer to be seen on Kansas roadways, because of breeding habits during the fall and growth of vegetation during the spring. Sunrise and sunset are the times that deer are most active.

Commissioner Praeger urges Kansas motorists to check with their insurance agents to find out the type of vehicle accident damage coverage their policies have. Then, if a deer accident occurs, a policyholder should contact his or her insurance agent or company quickly to begin the claims process.

To help avoid deer-vehicle collisions, Commissioner Praeger suggests the following:

- Stay alert, always wear your seat belt and drive at a safe, sensible speed for conditions.
- Watch for the reflection of deer eyes and for deer silhouettes on the shoulder of the road.
- Do not rely exclusively on devices such as deer whistles, deer fences and reflectors to deter deer.
 - When driving at night, use high-beam headlights when there is no opposing traffic. The high beams will illuminate the eyes of deer on or near a roadway.
 - Brake firmly when you notice a deer in or near your path, but stay in your lane. Many serious accidents occur when drivers swerve to avoid a deer and hit other vehicles or lose control of their cars. Potentially, you will risk less injury by hitting the deer.
- If you see one deer, it is likely there are more close by.
 - If the deer stays on the road, stop on the shoulder, put on your hazard lights and

wait for the deer to leave the roadway; do not try to go around the deer while it is on the road.

With an accident occurs, motorists should consider the following:

- If you do hit a deer and are uncertain whether the animal is dead, keep your distance. You might be dealing with an injured, wild animal with sharp hooves that can inflict serious bodily injury.
- If the deer is blocking the roadway and poses a danger to other motorists, you should immediately report the incident to the local law enforcement agency.

“Defensive driving is always important, but this time of year it’s extremely important,” Commissioner Praeger said. “Do everything you can to protect yourself and your family while driving.”