

Deer strikes account for most Hanford highway accidents



More than half of Hanford's traffic accidents last year involved vehicles striking deer or elk. The most likely time of year is the fall mating season, and the most likely time of day is between dusk and dawn. The most likely place is between the 300 Area and the Wye Barricade.

Because of this highway hazard, the Security Education department of Safeguards and Security has a Web page devoted to avoiding deer strikes. You can find it at http://www.rl.gov/sas/pg54_oper/pg54/pg54deer.htm. It includes a map spotted with red dots — one for each deer strike.

On the SAS map, the road between the 300 Area and the Wye Barricade is thick with the red dots. A chart of dates, locations and times of day shows that most deer strikes happen from mid-September through November and that twice as many occur before sunrise as after nightfall.

The experience can be devastating, as Cherri DeFigh-Price attests in a letter published on the Web page. It describes her experience a few minutes after 6 p.m. on Nov. 5, 1996.

"It was overcast and already quite dark," DeFigh-Price reported. "I was almost home. This five-point buck came from the left (driver's side) and tried to jump over the hood of the car.

"He missed the bumper totally, hit the hood and went sideways. He was running at full speed. The first thing I saw was a large deer head and horns flying toward the windshield. The last thing I remember is seeing his eye and part of the horn coming through the window."

The next thing she knew, she was stopped beside the road. The driver's side was badly dented, the hood was cracked, she was covered with glass and the rear-view mirror was in her lap. Repairs exceeded \$5,000, "But I was just thankful I walked off without even a cut," she said. "The center of impact in the windshield was directly in front of my face and the 'crater' went from top to bottom of the window.

"'Deer in the headlights' has taken on a new meaning to me," DeFigh-Price wrote. "I periodically have flashbacks seeing the terror in the deer's eye as he was propelled into the window. I see it now every time a tumbleweed blows in front of my car or a rabbit or coyote run across the road in front of me."

The Web site offers defensive driving techniques and tips to help prevent such experiences. They include slowing down, not tailgating and sounding the horn if a deer or elk is on the pavement or about to step onto it. Other tips and techniques cover the use of lights and the unpredictable nature of the big game animals.

If an animal is hit, notify Hanford Patrol on 911 or 373-3800 ♦