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Device sounds alarm to keep deer off roads

STORYCHAT: Post Comment
Sunday, August 12, 2007

By CAROL COMEGNO
Courier-Post Staff
SPRINGFIELD

Standard yellow, diamond-shaped road signs carrying an image of a deer warn motorists of deer crossings on a stretch of Saylor's Pond Road near Fort Dix.

Deer live all over this rural township of 30 square miles, but nowhere are they more abundant than along this road, where they live in woods and cross the road to forage on tender corn or other vegetation growing in the fields.

And no where else in the township are there as many traffic accidents -- 60 to 80 a year involving deer as they gallop across the road in front of vehicles, according to local officials.

To prevent such accidents, a new wildlife crossing guard system is being tested on Saylor's Pond Road by a Mount Laurel company, Jafa Technologies Inc.

Since the system, a mounted plastic box that flashes and emits a shrill alarm, has been in place for about 10 days, there has not been any reported deer accidents at that location, Police Chief Kenneth Gerber said. The devices typically cost about \$150 each; Jafa is absorbing the cost for the test.

"It appears initially to be working and we will know better when we get into the fall mating season for deer," said township Councilman Peter Sobotka

If the devices work, it likely would be embraced in a nation where there are more than 1.5 million accidents with deer annually, costing \$1.1 billion in property damage and causing more than 150 fatalities, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

In addition to causing damage or death, deer carcasses also cost New Jersey counties money now that the state no longer pays for their removal from roadways.

Burlington County retrieved 249 deer from road accidents in 2006 and this year has nearly reached that figure with 243, said county highway superintendent Paul Wnek.

In Springfield, more than 100 deer accidents are reported every year -- usually at least one every week - with many causing vehicle damage and injuries, Gerber said. The county removed 37 carcasses from the township in 2006, while local animal control contractors and individuals removed others.

Township officials said the goal is to make roadways safer for residents and others who use Saylor's Pond Road, a major artery to Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force Base.

"Most deer accidents are serious because they are moving and have mass when they hit a vehicle," Sobotka said.

Gerber said he is eager to see what the test will show and will be impressed with "whatever works."

"White-tailed deer are the biggest problem out here and the worst time is at night," Gerber said.

On its Web site, Tirol County in Austria had the devices installed last year. Since then, the county reported only two deer accidents -- a drop from an average 20 to 30 per year.

Carol Bozarth, Jafa president, said the innovative device is a solar-powered miniprocessor that does not detect deer, but vehicles. She said it is made only in Austria by IPTE and is being tested for the first time in the U.S. by her company in a joint marketing venture with IPTE.



AVI STEINHARDT/Courier-Post
Carol Bozarth and Ed Mulka of Mount Laurel's Jafa Technologies Inc. are testing a device in Springfield to prevent deer from running into cars. Jafa is absorbing the cost of the test.

TIPS
How to avoid deer collisions:

Be aware of posted deer crossing signs.

Deer are most active at night between 6 and 9 p.m.

Use high beams at night as much as possible to illuminate the sides of roads where deer can linger.

Do not rely on deer whistles. Studies have shown deer are not deterred by this method.

If a collision is imminent, it may be best not to swerve. The risk of injury from other vehicles or from losing control may be greater than from the deer.



AVI STEINHARDT/Courier-Post
A Wildlife Crossing Guard system is being tested on Saylor's Pond Road. No deer accidents have been reported since its installation.

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She said the wildlife protection unit senses headlights on oncoming vehicles up to 100 to 150 yards away. When activated, the sensor triggers a shrill alarm and a blue flashing strobe light meant to alert deer to a danger and keep them from crossing the road when a car is coming.

She said the device works best from dusk to dawn, when deer are most active and looking for food.

"What makes this device so much more effective than others is that this can detect headlights before a deer sees them and gets mesmerized," said Ed Mulka, project manager in JAFA.

Township council and Burlington County gave the company permission to install 38 of the alert units on four-foot posts along a three-quarter-mile stretch of Saylor's Pond Road between Route 68 and the corn fields of the Helis Stock Farm, where tall corn now beckons deer. .

Bozarth said that if the devices prove as successful here as they have in Austria, her long-term business plan includes an intent to manufacture the devices in South Jersey in conjunction with IPTE.

Reach Carol Comegno at (609) 267-9486 or ccomegno@courierpostonline.com

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