



VITALS

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A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

Dangerous Deer

As the deer population continues to increase, the likelihood of hitting one also grows. It can happen any time of the year. Last June a paramedic and patient were killed when the driver swerved to avoid a deer. It was around 2:40 a.m. The patient was being transported from an extended care facility to a hospital. The Emergency Warning Systems were activated. The speed of the vehicle was not described.

As the driver swerved, the passenger side wheels left the road. The rear compartment of the ambulance struck a tree, ripping open and ejecting three occupants. Other trees were struck before the ambulance came to rest. Although the speed wasn't given, how fast do you think he was going to generate these forces?

The 82-year-old patient was pronounced dead at the scene. The 31-year-old medic died later of multiple trauma. The third rear-compartment occupant was admitted in serious condition. The driver, who was wearing a seat belt, was admitted to the hospital in stable condition.

Can you imagine the questions the driver might be asking himself? Did the clinical circumstance justify running hot? Was I driving too fast at night next to a wooded area? Was I over driving my headlights? Was I too tired to be driving at 2:40 in the morning? Was I well rested when I began my shift? Would it have been smarter to hit the deer? Was I really concentrating on how I was driving? Was I on "automatic pilot"? Can I still do this job?

Do you think this event could precipitate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? Some studies have estimated that as many as 20% of workers in the ambulance industry suffer from psychopathologies, such as, PTSD, anxiety, depression and stress.

Drunken Driving Rates

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health was based on a random sample of 127,283 adults who were asked if they had driven under the influence (UTI) in the past year. The study was conducted over 2004, 2005 and 2006. The States with the highest rates of driving under the UTI were Wisconsin, North Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota. More than 25% of Wisconsin drivers admitted driving UTI. Utah had the lowest rate and was the only State in which fewer than 10% of drivers drove UTI. Nationally, the number of impaired drivers in alcohol related crashes in 1996 was 12,348 and in 2006 were 12,491. Although this is a stable number, it is based on drivers who have a measured blood alcohol of 0.08 per cent or higher. This should not generate a false sense of security. Another way to look at these numbers is that in most States one out of ten drivers has driven UTI.

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