

[Print Page](#)[Close Window](#)

Town deals with deer - by yelling at them

By DAVID BENSON Staff Writer, 609-272-7206
(Published: November 25, 2007)

Collisions between deer and cars along a short stretch of road near Fort Dix in Burlington County seem to have ended, thanks to a small box that flashes a blue-white strobe and shrieks like a dying woodchuck.

Ed Mulka, a spokesman for Mount Laurel-based Jafa Technologies, said the Wildlife Crossing Guard keeps deer off the streets at a critical time. "The biggest problem with deer collisions is between dusk and dawn," Mulka said. That's when deer may try to cross roads to get to favored feeding or bedding grounds.

Last year, there were 53 reported deer-related accidents in Springfield Township, Burlington County. Police Chief Kenneth C. Gerber said deer have been a nuisance on other roads in his jurisdiction, but there hasn't been a single deer-related collision on the half-mile stretch of road since the units were installed Aug. 2.

The brick-sized shriekers deter the deer after dark, but only when an automobile approaches. Other deer-warning devices work like scarecrows: They're targeted to frighten the animal every time it comes near.

But familiarity breeds contempt, and deer can learn to tolerate loud noises and bright lights. A drive on the Garden State Parkway at dusk gives credence to the fearlessness of the animal.

"That doesn't happen here," Mulka said. That's because the Crossing Guard isn't a constant wail against the critters. Its silence is as important as its cries and lights.

"Deer will find a way to get to an area they want to get to," said Mulka, an avid hunter and project manager for Jafa. "We want to make sure they don't cross a road when a car goes by."

The Crossing Guards are mounted on fence posts on Saylor's Pond Road. They face the forest where deer are likely to try to cross the pavement.

"This unit is not activated by the animal," Mulka said. "Only by headlights." A sensor inside the guard picks up the lights and activates the unit.

Springfield Township is 30 square miles of rural roads and country living, Gerber said. Saylor's Pond Road accounted for several of the 53 deer-related accidents in 2006, but Gerber couldn't say how many.

"The company picked that part of the road by how many deer carcasses we found in the area," he said. "We picked up several."

For most of the night, the guards are silent. That allows the animals to cross the road to reach food and safe lodging. Only when a car's headlights hit the sensors do the units let out the cry of an animal in pain and flash warnings to any deer hiding along the roadside.

The programmable guard has what Mulka described as the eerie whistle-shriek of a woodchuck in distress.

"I once heard a woodchuck taken by a coyote," Mulka said. "It made that sound."

But different sounds can be programmed into the guard to keep the deer on their pointy toes and off the road. "A coyote's bark, a bear's growl, even a person talking," Mulka said.

The real test begins this month. "When the company put the devices out there, it was a slow period of time," Gerber said. "Now it's fall. The bucks are in rut, and the hunting season has started."

The combination of hunting and mating season has deer on the move. "Now the company will see if it really works," Gerber said.

Mulka doesn't think the bucks will cross the guard. Although this is the first test of the devices in this country, they've been in use overseas for more than a year.

In 2005, Tyrol County in Austria reported 28 collisions between deer and automobiles. Last year, after installing hundreds of units along a six-kilometer stretch, the number of accidents dropped to two.

Mulka said he believes the results will be more dramatic in Burlington County. He said the units, which the company provided free for testing, will remain on guard through January. He doesn't expect any deer to be involved in an accident as long as the units are active.

There are 39 Crossing Guards spaced about 50 yards apart. Mulka said good protection requires about 70 units per mile. At \$150 each, it costs about \$10,000 for a mile of coverage. The solar-powered guards last about five years.

Mulka says it's worth it. He quoted a State Farm Insurance Cos. study that cites annual figures of 1.5 million animal-vehicle collisions, more than \$1 billion in damages, 10,000 injuries and about 150 fatalities.

And the problem isn't going away. Deer skulk along highways across the state.

"It's our own fault," Mulka said. "When we encroach on deer's territory, when we chase predators away, when we plant gardens and shrubbery along highways and salt the highways, we put good food near the roads."

We've created a banquet, Mulka said. And the deer have come to feed. Turning on the lights and woodchuck's howl may be enough to keep them off the asphalt table.

To learn more about the devices, visit:

www.jafatech.com

To e-mail David Benson at The Press:

DBenson@pressofac.com

Print Page

Close Window