

# Overdriving Headlights



More than half of the Marine driving deaths happen at night.

By CMC (SD)

**W**hen you drive at night, you are in greater danger than when you drive in the daytime. More than half of the Marine driving deaths happen at night. Factors contributing to an increased risk include:

- Reduced visibility. Drivers cannot see as far ahead and can see very little to either side.
- Drowsiness and fatigue.
- Alcohol consumption before driving.

Extra risk calls for extra use of operational risk management (ORM). You must make important changes in the way you drive.

The faster you drive, the more time and distance you need to stop, and the less time you have to react. At night, when you can see only as far as your headlights allow, the situation is worse. If you go too fast, you will overdrive your headlights.

Most high-beam headlights (maintained properly) shine no more than 450 feet ahead. Low-beam headlights shine no more than 350 feet. Driving within the range means you should be traveling at

a speed that would allow you to stop safely within the distance covered by your headlights. You need to watch carefully for highway signs, signals and pavement markings. Traffic signs and pavement markings reflect light, making them easier to see.

Anything smaller than a car—a motorcycle, moped, bicycle, pedestrian or animal—is especially hard to see at night. Pedestrians, animals, and vehicles without lights will be invisible until your headlights shine on them. Most drivers need about 1.5 seconds to react after seeing an object on the road. You might be able to swerve and miss an object or person on the road unless you are driving too fast. Then the consequences can be deadly!

Every year, Marines are injured in collisions with deer or crashes resulting from swerving to miss deer. ORM calls for the following preventive measures:

- Deliberately look for deer, and, if you see them, slow down.

- Do not risk dodging a deer at any speed. Many crashes occur when drivers swerve to avoid a deer and hit another vehicle or leave the road and roll over.

- Brake when you see a deer in the road, rather than try to avoid it. If you can't avoid a collision, release the brake at the time of impact, making it possible for the deer to go underneath the vehicle, rather than through the windshield.

- Once a deer clears the roadway, proceed cautiously, because other deer may be following closely.

- If you hit a deer, report the crash to the local police authorities and to your insurance company.

Low headlight beams are not made for speeds of more than 40 mph, so use high beams as much as possible on highways and unlighted streets. However, low beams are mandatory if you are within 500 feet of another vehicle or in fog. If you think you see something beyond the range of the headlights, flash the high beams for a second to see what is there. If oncoming headlights blind you, slow down and do not look directly at the lights. Look beyond them, at the right edge of the road, but keep the approaching vehicle in your peripheral vision.

Going around a curve, your headlights shine straight ahead, slow down, because you cannot see as well.

Do not forget to increase your following distance to three seconds plus or more if road or weather conditions are poor. The car ahead may stop with little warning. Extra seconds of following distance give you a greater cushion of space.

If your windshield is dirty, it increases the glare from approaching vehicles. Keep your windshield and headlights clean.

Reduced speed, increased following distance, extra alertness, and all the other measures mentioned can help prevent crashes, but the unexpected still can and often does happen. The most important safety measure of all is always to wear your safety belt. **S**

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