

# Clemson researchers work to educate people about night driving

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**CHARLESTON, S.C.** - Drivers see more poorly at night and pedestrians overestimate how visible they are to motorists, according to a Clemson University researcher who has been studying night driving for 20 years.

Clemson psychology professor Rick Tyrrell has conducted more than 30 experiments to find ways to help both drivers and pedestrians be safer after dark.

Over the weekend, two pedestrians in Aiken County died after being hit by cars while trying to cross a highway at night, and a Walhalla man died after he was struck by a Greenville County sheriff's deputy's car while crossing a street early in the morning.

Each year about 5,000 pedestrians are hit and killed in traffic accidents.

"Most of those incidents happen at night even though there are fewer drivers," Tyrrell said.

Tyrrell's research has found that drivers steer pretty well at night, which may lead to not slowing down. Most drivers also rely too heavily on low beam headlights, he added.

Most pedestrians wear dark clothing, making them harder to see and when they do wear reflective material, it's usually a vest, he said. Reflective material would be better if people wore it on their joints so it would move more, he said.

"Humans are good at seeing humans in motion," he said.

Tyrrell and another Clemson psychology professor, Johnell Brooks, use a driving simulator to study how drivers of different ages perform at night.

They have found that while drivers stay in their lanes well, they overestimate how well they see in the dark. Older drivers have more difficulty seeing at night but then also tend to be more aware of the problem.

The simulator allows researchers to put people into what might be dangerous situations and record how they react.

In another experiment, a volunteer pedestrian walks in place in a low-traffic area in a Clemson neighborhood. Sometimes the volunteer wears only dark clothing, other times reflective material.

Student volunteers then are driven through the area and push a button when they first see the pedestrian.

The study found that if people are going to wear reflective material, the best place is on the ankles because they move as you walk and the low beams will shine on the ankles first.

Tyrrell said people need to be educated about the hazards of night driving and hope pedestrians will wear more reflective clothing and stay away from busy traffic areas.

If such warnings "can get into their heads before they decide to step into an intersection, I've succeeded," he said.

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*Information from: The Post and Courier, <http://www.charleston.net>*