HOW TO HELP ELIMINATE DANGERS ON THE ROAD AND KEEP INTERSECTIONS SAFE

RED-LIGHT SAFETY

April, 2015
Every day in the United States, people take to the streets with their vehicles, their bicycles and their feet. Getting there and back safely depends greatly on a driver’s skill, courtesy and respect for traffic laws. When these safeguards break down or go ignored, tragedy can follow. Nowhere in our daily city travels is the threat greater than when a driver runs a red light. Communities across the country acknowledge this danger as a public concern and are taking measures to prevent it.

This overview provides facts and information about the dangers of red-light running and how it affects communities, large and small. It also illustrates how red-light safety cameras serve as a public safety benefit best measured in lives saved and injuries prevented, while also providing other services to the community.

The Danger of Running Red-Lights

On average, traffic crashes injure or kill four people every minute in the United States. These events are especially dangerous at intersections. In 2013, an estimated 412,000 crashes at signalized intersections resulted in injury or death. Red-light runners alone caused an estimated 129,000 injuries and 696 fatalities that year.

The red-light running T-bone or angle crash is one of the most dangerous types of traffic collisions. The impact pits one vehicle’s front-end against another vehicle’s more vulnerable passenger compartment. Compounding the problem is the red-light runner is typically accelerating through the intersection to beat the red light.

An average of 694 people died in red-light running crashes each year, 59 died each month, and 2 each day from 2009-2013.

In addition to causing fatalities and injuries, these collisions have major financial repercussions for the community, including medical costs and property damage, and they contribute to traffic congestion and related inconveniences by disrupting the flow of traffic.

A single fatal crash cost society $6 million in 2009 dollars, which included costs to victims, families, government, insurers and taxpayers.

People run red lights for a variety of reasons, such as speeding, distractions (eating, texting and talking to passengers), or simply because they assume it can be done without consequence. As children,
we understand that red means stop, yet as licensed drivers, many of us ignore responsible behavior while behind the wheel in favor of beating a red light. The harrowing aftermath of this reckless behavior in cities and towns throughout the U.S. is chronicled on RanARedLight.us. Here, daily news stories are posted as a public service tool to inform people about the dangers of red-light running and their potential to change lives in any community.

In 2012, more than half of the 683 red-light running deaths were people other than the red-light runner.7

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has quantified the lifesaving and injury preventing benefits of red-light safety cameras. Its new online tool calculates the economic benefits a state may expect when using red-light safety cameras alone or in combination with any number of 11 other safety tools. As cameras help reduce fatal crashes and injury collisions, medical costs, workplace costs, property damage and other costs are reduced, providing an overall savings on a state level. By including red-light cameras in its online tool targeted at state decision-makers, the CDC recognizes the safety contributions cameras offer to a state. The CDC’s Motor Vehicle Prioritizing Interventions and Cost Calculator for States (MV PICCS) can be viewed at http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/calculator/index.html.

The Red-Light Safety Camera Solution

Automated enforcement systems have become a commonly used tool for reducing red-light running and enhancing a community’s police force. A variety of systems and technologies exist and vary from vendor to vendor as well as from state to state.

The AutoPatrol™ Red-Light Safety Camera Solution, provided by American Traffic Solutions (ATS), is an example of intersection safety automated enforcement and is comprised of a camera, strobe, radar and computer system installed near the intersection. The system captures images and video of vehicles that pass through the intersection after the light has turned red. Authorities review violations and approve citations. Typically, a 30-day grace period in which violators receive warnings in the mail occurs prior to the start date for citations, providing drivers with the opportunity to change their behavior without getting fined.

Red-light safety cameras enhance public safety in much the same way a police officer does when stationed at an intersection. When drivers know they could be ticketed for running a red light, they will choose to slow down and stop. As of Nov. 1, 2014, nearly 500 U.S. communities were using red-light safety camera programs to enhance public safety.
The number of cities using red-light safety cameras increased 122% from 2007 to 2014.\(^8\)

The Results

Since implementing red-light safety cameras, communities throughout the U.S. have seen results such as significant reductions in red-light running related collisions, deaths, injuries, expenses and inconveniences. In most cases, once a driver gets a red-light running ticket, that person does not get a second violation, which indicates a positive change in driver behavior.

A 2011 Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study of large U.S. cities found red-light safety cameras reduce fatal red-light running crashes by 24 percent.\(^12\)

The decrease in red-light running fatalities from 768 in 2008 to 696 in 2013, amounts to a savings to society of more than $430 million for 72 fewer fatalities.\(^13\)

Other Community Benefits

A portion of the revenue produced by paid red-light running violations caught on camera is often used to fund important programs, primarily benefiting medical research and law enforcement.

In Florida, $3 from every paid violation has provided nearly $8 million to the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, and $10 from each paid violation has provided more than $23 million to 22 trauma centers.\(^14\)

Road safety cameras are not only a powerful tool for encouraging safer driver behavior, but they also help law enforcement solve a variety of other crimes. Police are turning to video and still images taken by road safety cameras to investigate hit-and-run collisions, assaults and homicides. Across the country, authorities are using the technology to supplement their investigations, just as they used the surveillance cameras in chasing down the Boston Marathon bombers.

On average, police make 335 requests each month to American Traffic Solutions for video footage and photographs from road safety cameras. Authorities use the information to identify criminals, vehicles and to track the whereabouts of suspects and missing persons.
ATS has processed nearly 15,000 requests for videos and stills since April 2011.\(^{15}\)

After her car was stolen and involved in a hit-and-run collision that sent a motorcyclist to the emergency room, a Tucson, Arizona, college student found a clue to the crimes in her mailbox. She received a red-light running notice of violation with the photograph of a stranger driving her car. Authorities are calling the driver a person of interest in the case.\(^ {18}\)

In Surfside, Florida, police used video from a red-light safety camera to identify the suspect in a rape case. The video showed the man walking behind the woman shortly before the sexual assault took place. Authorities made their arrest a week after the July 2, 2012 attack.\(^ {19}\)

Photographs of a suspect’s vehicle helped police in Florissant, Missouri, solve a July 2008 incident that left a young woman shot and killed during a street robbery.\(^ {20}\)

**Results Around the Globe**

Red-light safety cameras were developed in the Netherlands in the 1960s. As the popularity of the systems has grown, so too has the technology powering the cameras and the effectiveness of the traffic safety programs they support.

With cameras in place in Austria, the number of people crossing junctions at a red light has decreased significantly. In 2013, there were 4,500 fewer red-light running violations than in 2012.\(^ {21}\)

**Public Opinion**

While there is no question that camera programs are sometimes controversial, there is also a significant amount of public opinion research that shows the majority of Americans support red-light safety cameras. In poll after poll, most Americans favor the use of red-light safety cameras as an enforcement tool to reduce dangerous crashes. This support crosses demographic and regional lines and is particularly strong in communities that have deployed red-light safety cameras.
We are really not trying to engage in ‘gotcha,’ and we’re really not trying to do this as a revenue-raising exercise. And one thing that I say is if the drivers of New York slow down, obey the speed limit, and stop running red lights – and the city collects no revenue – I’ll consider it a victory.

Polly Trottenberg
Commissioner, New York City Department of Transportation
WCBS-TV CBS 2 (New York)
June 18, 2014

Sources

4 2013 estimate based on applying 3% decrease (reported in first source) in total intersection fatalities from 2012 to 2013 to the red-light running injury total (133,000) in 2012 reported by Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), Red light running Q and A: Why is Red Light Running a Problem? http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/red-light-running/qanda

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14. Florida Department of Revenue.
http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/taxes/distributions.html

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