Red Means STOP!

Drive in Las Vegas for more than an hour and you'll discover the number one rule of traffic safety here: Don't go on green! To drive defensively here includes making sure you have looked both ways before crossing the street on foot and in your car. We have a terrible Red-Light-Running problem.

Nationally, red-light-running was to blame for 200,000 crashes, over 150,000 injuries and more than 1,100 fatalities in 2001. From 1992-2000 the number of fatal crashes at signalized intersections jumped 19 percent. With RLR being the single most frequent cause. That's more than three-times the rate of increase for all other fatal crashes in the same time period.\(^{\text{[fhwa-02]}}\)

Currently Nevada is one of three states nation-wide that prohibits any photo enforcement that does not include a police officer. We would like to see this ban lifted so that we will be able to make the decision about augmenting patrol activity on a by-county basis.

As of July, 2002, more than 70 communities in the US are using photo enforcement for some form of traffic control (see list.) The results are typically favorable, it seems the big problems have been with the licensing of the cameras themselves, and not with the legalities of them.

**Do As I Say, Not As I Do…**

Most Americans (96 percent) are afraid of being hit by a red light runner, but nearly 1 in 5 admit to running a red light in the last ten intersections. The leading excuse is simply “being in a hurry.” A 2001 Harris Poll, conducted for the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety found that 73 percent of the public supports red light camera enforcement. Polls taken for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety also have found that the large majority of the U.S. public supports the use of red light cameras– 80 percent in five cities with cameras and 76 percent in five cities without cameras.

The increasing use of red-light cameras has been fueled by escalating violations combined with growing public support, advances in technology, and mounting documentation of their safety benefits. Red light cameras have been shown to be a promising tool that:
- Changes behavior, leading to safer driving habits
- Saves lives
- Reduces crashes and dangerous driving
- Reduces health care costs
- Increases officer and public safety
- Responds to public concerns
- Creates a violator-based revenue source that can be used to increase public safety

**Just the Facts Ma’am**

**Myth: Like old-fashioned speed traps, photo enforcement is designed to make money, not protect the public**

The objective of photo-enforcement is to deter violations, not to surreptitiously catch violators. The more public the enforcement is, the better. Photo-enforcement cameras are in plain view, not hidden. There typically are signs and publicity campaigns warning drivers that photo enforcement is in use. And unlike speed traps, photo enforcement is fair.

**Myth: Photo-enforcement cameras make too many mistakes.**

Every technological and every human system can make mistakes. However, photo enforcement has been in use in the United States for more than 10 years and has proven extremely accurate and reliable. Photo-enforcement laws require the cameras to meet specified standards and to be well maintained.

**Myth: With photo-enforcement, owners are guilty until proven innocent.**

Opponents of photo-enforcement raise this issue frequently. At first blush it has strong appeal because the presumption of innocence is one of our most treasured constitutional rights. However, photo-enforcement does not violate the presumption of innocence, which attaches at trial, not before.
What Kind of Results Are Communities Getting?

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<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Violation/Crash Reduction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oxnard, California</td>
<td>Injury crashes at intersections with traffic signals dropped 29 percent after camera enforcement began in 1997, reductions occurred at intersections with and without cameras.</td>
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<td>Fairfax, Virginia</td>
<td>Red light violations declined 44 percent after one year of camera enforcement.</td>
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<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>Red light running fatalities were reduced from 16 percent to 2 percent in the first two years of red light cameras.</td>
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<td>Charlotte, North Carolina</td>
<td>Red light running violations dropped by more than 70 percent in the first year.</td>
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<td>New York City</td>
<td>The city experienced a 62 percent decline in red light violations at camera intersections.</td>
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<td>Howard County, Maryland</td>
<td>In the four years the cameras have been operational, the number of crashes at every camera location dropped, with the declines ranging from 21 percent to 37.6 percent.</td>
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<td>San Francisco, California</td>
<td>Red light cameras led to a 68 percent violation rate reduction.</td>
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<td>Los Angeles County, California</td>
<td>Experienced a 92 percent drop in violations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>Automated Enforcement of Traffic Signals: A Literature Review reported violation reductions ranging from 20 percent to 87 percent, with half of the jurisdictions reporting between 40 percent and 62 percent reductions in red light violations.</td>
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As with most sound traffic safety programs, the “Three-E’s” approach works best. . .

The most effective countermeasure available appears to be a combination of education, engineering and enforcement that includes photo-enforcement technology.

Intersection photo enforcement has been successful not only in reducing violations, but in reducing crashes as well. Most encouragingly, there seems to be a spillover effect of violation reductions to intersections not equipped with cameras, indicating that photo-enforcement is leading to a more widespread behavioral change.

(Key Points:)
- One in three people claim they personally know someone who has been injured or killed in a red-light-running crash — similar to the percentage of people who know someone who was killed or injured by a drunk driver.
- About 21 percent said they felt that drunk driving incidents are decreasing, but only six percent felt that red light running incidents were decreasing.
- Although, social scientists might hypothesize that “frustration” and “road rage” would represent what most people perceived as the cause of red light running, results proved otherwise. Only 15.8 percent of respondents cited those reasons, while nearly half (47.8 percent) admitted to being prompted by nothing more complicated than being in a hurry.
- Red light runners do not conform to a set demographic — the dangerous practice reaches across drivers of all age, economic groups and gender. The perpetrators are everyday people; professionals, blue-collar workers, unemployed, homemakers, parents, and young adults.

(R. Retting, ITE Journal)