



National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running

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CONTACT: Jeff Agnew
202-828-9100

Declining Use of Warning Periods, Signs Result in Compromised Photo Enforcement Programs

Community acceptance, program effectiveness suffer as a result

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WASHINGTON, DC (August 18, 2009) — A disturbing new trend appears to be developing in U.S. communities deploying photo enforcement programs. Contrary to practices recommended by national authorities and scientific studies, warning periods and signs are being omitted from community program planning, resulting in a failure to implement a key element of effective, widely-accepted photo enforcement programs: a comprehensive public awareness campaign.

Since 2001, the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running has called for authorities deploying camera programs to establish warning periods and post warning signs at camera-enforced locations as part of a “fairness principle” that educates motorists and encourages them to comply with the law before resorting to punishment. This commonsense approach is also advised by the Federal Highway Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and has been shown to encourage public approval. However, a look at new programs now being established indicates these previously common practices are being omitted from photo enforcement programs across the country.

“Warning periods and signs are important public education tools communities use to inform motorists of photo enforcement programs and the dangers of aggressive driving,” said Campaign executive director Leslie Blakey. “They demonstrate a commitment to safety, not a commitment to revenue.”

In New York State, Long Island’s Nassau County elected not to use a warning period to publicize their red light camera program before commencing with citations. The program went live in early August. During an April meeting, the County Legislature was urged to forgo the warning period citing “sufficient” media coverage of the cameras. During warning periods, the Campaign recommends that offenders be sent non-monetary citations and be alerted to the imminent beginning of the safety program.

In July, officials in tiny Heath, Ohio (population 8,903) decided to refund 265 photo speeding tickets that were issued after the original 30-day warning period was cut short. Then in August, public acceptance suffered another setback when more than 10,000 citations were issued in the first three weeks of the program. Since then, camera opponents gathered sufficient signatures to place an amendment to ban photo enforcement cameras on Heath’s November ballot.

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In some states, like California, a 30-day warning period is required by law. Yet, on August 11, a California Superior Court Judge ruled that the city of Santa Ana's photo enforcement program violated the law by using a 24-day warning period at the commencement of their program in 2003 and by failing to use any warning period when cameras were installed or relocated thereafter.

Out of 24 photo-enforced cities in the Chicago area, only one posted photo enforcement warnings at its city limits, according to a survey conducted by the *Chicago Tribune*, although all 24 cities had signs posted at the photo enforced intersections. Federal guidance recommends signage at both the camera-enforced location and at the city limits.

In neighboring Missouri, the city of St. Louis violated its own law when officials failed to post signs at camera enforced intersections. The city may have to recall the 31,000 tickets issued between the February 16 passage of the law and July 1. Signs were posted July 7, following an inquiry from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Examples of model programs, such as Virginia Beach's *Photo Safe* and Montgomery County, Maryland's *Safe Speed*, have generated positive coverage in the media and wide-spread community support by launching multifaceted public awareness campaigns, which included a 30-day warning period and extensive signage.

And some other jurisdictions are bucking the no-warning trend: Tempe, Arizona announced in April that flashing signs would be installed at photo radar locations that had developed a reputation as a speed trap. An online comment in response to the announcement summed it up saying, "I haven't seen those signs in action, but if they work [as described], I might actually begin to believe that the cameras are being placed for safety rather than revenue."

"The Campaign's message to communities considering establishing red light or speed camera program is: take note and require an advanced warning period and conspicuous signage as part of a broad-based public awareness and education campaign — or risk losing in the court of public opinion. And that could mean losing your program," Blakey said.

Since its inception, the Campaign has encouraged localities to use roadside photo enforcement warnings as a way of reminding motorists to pay attention to their driving. In 2005 the Federal Highway Administration confirmed this tactic's safety merits when it reported "the presence of warning signs at both [photo enforced] intersections and city limits and the application of high publicity levels will enhance the benefits of [photo enforcement] systems."

The National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running is a national advocacy group guided by an independent advisory board that includes leaders from the fields of traffic safety, law enforcement, transportation engineering, health care and emergency medicine, as well as crash victims. More information on the Campaign can be found at www.stopredlightrunning.com.

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