

SAFETY FOCUS

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This issue focuses on the effort to restore red light cameras in Virginia, an excellent op-ed from the Tulsa World, a recap of some recent red light running crashes, and a review of all red light and speed limit enforcement camera legislation.

Virginia Coalition Calls For Return Of Cameras

The Virginia Photo Red Coalition, a broad alliance of Virginia traffic safety advocates, are calling on the state legislature to reinstate the law that allowed seven Virginia communities to use automated enforcement technology to enforce red light running.

On December 19th, representatives from the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running, AAA Mid-Atlantic, the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, Virginia Commonwealth University and several municipalities held a press conference in Richmond to urge lawmakers to restore red light cameras to six Northern Virginia communities and Virginia Beach in the coming legislative session.

According to new statistics released by the Virginia Beach Police Department, red light running violations at several intersections formerly equipped with red light cameras have spiked over 99.5 percent since July when the law expired. The four intersections monitored have seen an increase from 488 in June to 1,056 in November. The city established an agreement with their photo enforcement technology provider to continue monitoring violations at the intersections without issuing citations.

Virginia Beach Chief of Police A.M. "Jake" Jacocks said, "Consistent enforcement is needed to really improve traffic safety. These numbers clearly show the change in driver behavior once the enforcement period ended. We have seen red light running violations jump dramatically since our cameras went dim. The citizens of Virginia support and approve the use of the red light cameras, and all of Virginia's photo enforcement programs have shown a decrease in red light running violations. We need our legislators to re-enact photo enforcement in Virginia."

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“Last year, red light camera laws were approved in Washington and Rhode Island, and several additional states had cities use ‘home rule’ provisions to establish red light camera systems, but Virginia took a step backward by allowing this law to expire,” said Leslie Blakey, Executive Director of the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running. “Red light cameras established a solid record of reducing red light violations and crashes in Virginia, and they need to be allowed to continue.”

Lon Anderson, spokesperson for AAA Mid-Atlantic, said, “The AAA Clubs in Virginia have made the reinstatement of red light cameras a legislative priority for 2006 because driver behavior, especially in the urban areas, is continuing to deteriorate. Red light photo enforcement is a proven deterrent to red light running that will prevent crashes and save lives and is an urgently needed tool in the metropolitan areas of the Commonwealth of Virginia.”

In 2005, the state legislature went against the primary recommendation of a 2004 study by the Virginia Transportation Research Council which urged the state legislature to extend the camera programs “for at least one



Laura Nichols, a red light running survivor advocate from Norfolk, talks to reporters after the Dec. 19th press conference in Richmond.



Campaign Communications Director Jeff Agnew shares the latest national statistics on red light running crashes and injuries during the Virginia Photo Red Coalition's Dec. 19th press conference at the Patrick Henry Building in Richmond.

year.” The study also directly credited the cameras with reducing red light running crashes in four Northern Virginia communities, found they reduced red light running violations by 34 percent, were technologically reliable and had widespread public support.

In 2003, red light running in Virginia caused almost 5,000 crashes, resulting in at least 18 deaths and more than 3,500 injuries. Red light running is the number one cause of intersection crashes in urban areas, and nationwide societal costs from red light running crashes top \$14 billion per year.

Dr. Michel Aboutanos, a trauma physician with Virginia Commonwealth University, said, “I stand firmly with the Virginia medical community in its laudable effort to reduce the physical, mental, emotional and psychological suffering caused by careless or inattentive drivers who are not stopping for red lights. Trauma centers across Virginia cannot do it alone, and we need the state legislature to help us change the belief that breaking the law is permissible as long as you can get away with it.”

Running Red Lights

By: David Averill

Dec. 18, 2005

Reprinted with permission from The Tulsa World.

Convincing jerks not to be jerks. Remember when you were little, your mom and your teachers in school warned you to “look both ways” before crossing a street?

That advice seems to go double these days when it comes to crossing an intersection, behind the wheel or on foot, even if you’ve got the green light. If you don’t heed that advice you just might get nailed or narrowly missed by some irresponsible jerk who thinks that a yellow light means “hurry” and a red light means “hurry more.”

Is it my imagination or are drivers who routinely run red lights becoming more numerous and more flagrant? I don’t think it’s my imagination.

Red light running is difficult to quantify because records are not kept specifically for that offense. It falls under “failed to yield for a signal light,” which was blamed for 1,161 crashes in Oklahoma last year, or “failed to stop for a traffic signal,” which was cited in 2,421 crashes. Of course most red light running cases do not result in wrecks, so those figures don’t shed much light on the extent of the problem.

Tulsa police wrote only 69 tickets last year for disobeying a signal light. Again, it seems obvious that most violations are not witnessed by police officers and therefore go un-ticketed. Running a red light is a crime of opportunity, the opportunity being the combination of a red light and no cop in sight.

Still, the problem is apparent enough and big enough that it has spawned a nationwide movement, the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running, as well as various studies and surveys by the insurance industry and other concerned groups.

Red light running was blamed for 207,000 crashes, 178,000 injuries and 921 fatalities in 2002. Fatal motor crashes at traffic signals increased 19 percent from 1992 to 2000. That category was the fastest growing among all types of fatal crashes. According to the National Campaign, more than half of those who are killed in red light running crashes are other motorists and pedestrians. The problem is worst in metropolitan areas, where red light running is among the leading causes of urban crashes.

One survey found that 96 percent of motorists feared being hit by a red light runner, but about 20 percent admitted they had recently run a red light.

There is a proven technology for discouraging red light running. Photo enforcement cameras are in use in 110 cities in 20 states, according to the National Campaign. The only one in this area is Garland, Texas, a Dallas suburb, although several other Texas cities, including Houston, reportedly are considering such systems.

Here’s how photo enforcement systems work: Cameras placed at intersections take pictures of the intersection after the light has turned red. The camera records the license plate of any car that is illegally in the intersection at that time. The pictures are mailed to the owner of offending vehicle, along with a ticket for the appropriate fine. Red light running fatalities decreased from 16 to 2 in the first two years after a photo enforcement system was employed in Washington, D.C. Fairfax, Va., experienced a 44 percent reduction in red light running cases after cameras were installed and Oxnard, Calif., saw a 22 percent reduction.

There are a couple of problems with such systems. One is that the cameras are expensive. There are, however, companies that will contract to install and operate photo enforcement systems in return for a percentage of the fines collected. Using a private contractor spares the municipality the capital expense.

The other problem is political, especially in this part of the country. Some critics and timid lawmakers see photo enforcement systems as big-brotherism or an invasion of privacy. That shouldn’t be a concern, because the photo is not taken until after the crime has been committed and the camera records only the tag number of the violator.

Photo enforcement in Oklahoma probably would require passage of a state law permitting a municipality to issue fines by mail. Cameras are employed on the state’s turnpikes, to catch scofflaws who run toll booths without paying, but they’re not permitted elsewhere.

What it comes down to is that people who make a practice out of running red lights, without regard to the health and safety of others, are simply irresponsible, self-absorbed, me-first jerks. How can you convince a jerk not to be a jerk? By one definition, a good citizen is one who obeys the law even when no one is around to see him break it. What we need is a little more good citizenship.

Red Light Running Crashes Mar 2005 Holiday Season

The last week of 2005 and the first week of 2006 saw record numbers of travelers on our nation's roads. Unfortunately, this also led to red light running crashes in almost every state.

Here are just a few of the more notable incidents reported in the news media:

A 77-year-old woman was killed Dec. 22nd in Scottsdale, AZ after a teenager fiddling with a satellite radio ran a red light and slammed into her car, police said. Joyce Kinnard of Scottsdale was turning left onto Raintree Drive about 7:30 p.m. when the 17-year-old Scottsdale boy's Ford Expedition hit her Chevrolet Corsica. Both drivers had been wearing seat belts. Police said charges are anticipated against the teen.

Two women were killed on Dec. 23rd, when the driver of a Honda Accord ran a red light in Long Beach, CA and broadsided their car. A 15-year-old girl remained hospitalized. The 21-year-old driver of the Honda suffered minor injuries and was arrested.

A police officer from Butler County, PA was hospitalized on Christmas Eve morning after his police cruiser was "T-boned" by another driver. According to media reports, Investigators say Patrolman Jack Linderman's vehicle was struck when another vehicle reportedly failed to stop at a red light. The officer's injuries were not serious.

A New Years Day crash in Tampa, FL claimed the life of a 64-year-old woman. Theodora W. Fox, of Lutz was killed about 6:30 a.m. when a woman pulled her Nissan Xterra into Fox's path. The SUV slammed into the right side of Fox's Saturn sedan, which flipped over, ejecting Fox. Toxicology test results on the surviving driver are pending.

On Jan. 4th, a car collided with a Central Florida day-care van, injuring seven children. Orlando police said a Ford Mustang apparently ran a red light and hit the van from Victoria Prep Christian Academy. Injuries to the children were not considered life-threatening. Three passengers in the Mustang had minor injuries. The 26-year-old male driver of the Mustang will face charges.

ACLU Challenges Camera Program

The American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota has filed a lawsuit against the new Minneapolis red light camera program claiming that the cameras are unconstitutional.

Mary Ellen Heng, an assistant city attorney, told *The Pioneer Press* newspaper that the city expected the challenge and that the courts have upheld other ordinances.

Lt. Greg Reinhardt, head of the department's Stop on Red program, said an owner of a vehicle who receives a ticket can contest it by showing that the car's title had been transferred or by identifying who was driving when the photo was taken.

A hearing on the suit has been scheduled for April, according to media reports.

The city reported in October that crashes at the intersections with cameras have dropped over 53 percent when compared to the past year's data. Right-angle crashes have dropped from 19 to 7.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"Even I am running or going through yellow lights when I used to stop."

--Virginia Beach driver Monica Eure interviewed as part of a Dec. 19th news story on WTKR-Channel 3 TV on the increase in red light running at intersections in Virginia Beach that used to be equipped with red light cameras.

Legislative Update — January 2006

If there is legislation pending in your state that is not listed here, please contact the Campaign at (202)828-9100 or info@stopredlightrunning.com.

RED LIGHT RUNNING SAFETY CAMERAS

Ohio: HB 56 (Raussen) would ban the use of automated enforcement technology. The House Transportation, Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee approved the bill on 4/4/05 by a vote of 8-3. The full House approved the legislation on 5/18/05. It has been referred to the Senate Committee on Highways and Transportation. An initial hearing was held on 10/4/05 and additional hearings were held on 10/18/05 and 11/02/05.

Massachusetts: HB 2023 (Honan) would authorize the cities of Boston and Cambridge to use automated traffic enforcement devices on certain roadways. Referred to the Joint Committee on Transportation. No further action.

Missouri: SB 719 (Crowell) would prohibit political subdivisions from adopting ordinances or regulations that authorize the use of photo radar or automated traffic control systems to enforce traffic laws. The bill was pre-filed and read for the first time on 1/04/06.

Pennsylvania: HB1568 (Creighton) would expand the use of red light cameras to communities other than Philadelphia. Introduced on 5/10/05 and referred to the House Transportation Committee.

Virginia: HB109 (Purkey) would reinstate the use of red light cameras to the seven communities that had operational camera systems prior to the July sunset of the red light camera authorization law. Pre-filed on 12/19/05. The bill has not been referred to any committee.

SPEEDING SAFETY CAMERAS

Arizona: Several senators have expressed their intentions of filing legislation that would block the City of Scottsdale from using speed limit enforcement cameras on a dangerous stretch of Loop 101. The city has undertaken an extensive public awareness campaign and will institute a 30-day grace period before issuing citations.

California: SB 466 (Kuehl) would allow the use of photo radar in residential areas. Amended to only allow enforcement in school zones and residential areas with posted speed limits under 30 mph. Referred back to Senate Transportation and Housing Committee.

Maryland: There is a possibility that Maryland legislators may try to overrule Gov. Robert Ehrlich's veto of HB 443, which would allow speed cameras in certain residential areas.

Attention Campaign Members!

We are seeking individuals and organizations to help advance our 2006 state legislative advocacy efforts. We need to hear from red light running victims, traffic safety advocates, law enforcement and health care professionals willing to contact legislators, provide testimony and expand our red light running enforcement efforts. Please e-mail us at info@stopredlightrunning.com or call 202-828-9100.