

Red Lights Mean Stop

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A Dangerous Act

Red light running is a dangerous form of aggressive driving, which is as serious a concern as drunk driving and not using seat belts. In 1998, for example, red light running accounted for about 89,000 crashes, 80,000 Injuries, and nearly 1000 deaths. The cost to the public is estimated to be as much as \$7 billion per year.

Nearly all drivers are concerned about this form of aggressive driving. More than 95 percent of those surveyed in 1998 by the National Stop Red Light Running Partnership said they were concerned about the actions of other drivers when they approach an intersection. Yet, in a surprising contrast to this concern, a second survey performed by Old Dominion University on behalf of the National Partners and released in September 1999 revealed that 56 percent of all Americans admit to running red lights. This number represents all income, gender and educational backgrounds.

National Partnership Tackles the Problem

In response to this type of information, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) created the Stop Red Light Running Program in 1995 as a community based safety program. The program raised awareness of the dangers of red light running and helped reduce fatalities in many of the participating communities. In fact, all of the communities have committed to continuing the Red Light Running Program, even in the absence of further funding from the FHWA. In April 1998, DaimlerChrysler and the American Trauma Society joined a national partnership with FHWA to continue the Stop Red Light Running Program. The Mission Statement for the program is:

"To continually reduce the incidence of red light running in order to prevent related crashes, trauma center admissions and fatalities."

The red light running partners accomplish this mission by providing leadership, advice, guidance and information to interested parties throughout the United States. The efforts undertaken by the partners are designed to inform and educate the general public and to enlist communities to take assertive action in combating red light running violations. To date, the campaign has expanded to more than 200 communities nationwide.

One of the principle means of capturing the public's attention and mobilizing resources to combat red light running is National Stop on Red Week. This is an annual event that provides local communities with the opportunity to tie their message in with the national program in order to expand the results of their efforts. This year, **National Stop on Red Week** takes place from **October 8 to October 14, 2000**.

New Enforcement Techniques Help

While FHWA recognizes that raising public awareness of the red light running problem helps, the FHWA also believes the use of red light cameras for enforcement can combat the problem. For instance, a recent report released by the FHWA shows that red light running violations decreased by as much as 60 percent at intersections where cameras automatically enforce the law. Reports from other locations indicate cameras can reduce related crashes and injuries by as much as 20 percent or more. As well, cameras increase the personal safety of police officers who no longer have to chase vehicles on the roads and frees them to carry out other important crime fighting responsibilities.

Currently there are 22 known states and one territory which have considered camera technology for enforcement and have either passed or considered legislation to enforce red light running with camera technology. For instance, the District of Columbia now operates cameras at as many as 50 intersections around the city.

The FHWA supports communities that choose to put cameras to use by providing technical advice and support through the FHWA Internet homepage (<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/programs/srlr.htm>) and in person. As well, cameras are eligible for Federal-aid funding through the normal channels in a State. However, the FHWA also cautions communities about red light cameras in two ways. First, make sure that the red light running problem is behavioral and not a result of an engineering problem such as poor intersection sight distance or improper signal timing. Second, cameras and the associated fines must be strictly used to enforce traffic laws and not simply as a means to raise revenues. When localities emphasize the money-making possibilities of these cameras rather than the safety benefits, people are likely to be less receptive.

More Information is Available

The FHWA and our partners have made a number of materials that are available through the Internet or by contacting the FHWA. They include:

- i) A Nationwide Survey of Red Light Running: *Measuring Driver Behaviors for the Stop Red Light Running Program*;
- ii) *Summary Report: Phase I of the Stop Red Light Running Campaign*;
- iii) A report entitled *Synthesis and Evaluation of Red Light Running Enforcement Programs in the United States*;
- iv) An internet homepage at safety.fhwa.dot.gov/programs/srlr.htm.
- v) A *Step by Step Guide* for community level stop red light running campaigns;
- vi) Report on *Intersection Factors that Affect Red Light Running*;

Conclusion

Red light running is a road safety concern that can be targeted to bring about the elimination of the related fatalities and injuries. Over the years, the U.S. Department of Transportation has been pleased to work with partners who are also committed to reducing the incidences of red light running. These partnerships have led to Federal, State and local efforts that have contributed to a 7.5% reduction in red light running fatalities and a 9% decrease in total red light running crashes in the last two years.

Surveys conducted by the National Partnership indicate that most people who run red lights do so because they are in a hurry. The time saved by avoiding a red light is not worth a human life. It is therefore critical for drivers to recognize that they can prevent intersection crashes by observing all traffic controls, driving the proper speed and being aware of other drivers. Safety is a two-way street -- all drivers share responsibility in avoiding motor vehicle crashes.