

# Proper engineering can prevent accidents

**A**pprehending "dangerous" red-light runners can be beneficial to traffic safety. However, people who honestly mistime an amber signal by less than two seconds don't fit the "dangerous" category. Most Palm Beach County lights contain a two-second all-red phase. Officers should use discretion.

Red-light violations have been greatly exaggerated as a cause of crashes.

Boca police officers and "educational" materials claim red-light running causes 22 percent of all crashes. Absolute nonsense invented by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Data from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles show red-light violations caused *only* 2 to 4 percent of all crashes and fatal crash factors from 1994-1999.

Furthermore, the situation is improving - not worsening - with 1999 being the safest year for Broward County. Palm Beach County numbers fell from 24 fatal crashes caused by red light running in 1998 to 13 in 1999.

These honest numbers fail to support such a zealous campaign or justify a "need" for cameras. Maybe that's why the data isn't being reported, despite the fact that I gave it to all camera proponents last year, including Rep. Curt Levine.

During Stop Red Light Running Week, Boca officers wrote 980 tickets and spouted a lot of rhetoric about "safety." However, more than 400 tickets resulted from drivers safely disobeying arbitrary "No Right Turn on Red" signs.

These folks do not qualify as "dangerous" red-light runners. Right turns on red normally constitute a legal act. Several phone calls to engineers, along with my personal experience and observations, revealed no valid, legitimate reason for these prohibitive signs. This situation borders on unethical, considering that many of these intersections are very safe with a separate lanes



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to expedite right turns!

I personally observed these conditions at Second Avenue and Yamato Road.

The people obeying the unjust law sit there - in their own special lane - for more than two minutes, while many safe opportunities to turn right were ignored.

These "No Right Turn on Red" signs violate the guidelines and spirit of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Illegitimately posted signs and improperly timed or synchronized traffic signals cause disobedience, unnecessary delays, alternate neighborhood routes and more accidents. The only purpose these "No Right Turn on Red" signs serve is the generation of revenue.

Traffic safety suffers or improves based upon the application of engineering, education and enforcement. Politicians and police endorse enforcement, often to the point of ignoring the other two.

Enforcement maintains the least positive effect on safety. Red-light cameras and speed enforcement blitzkriegs often decrease safety. For the record: almost all county speed limits remain illegitimate and, in some cases, illegally underposted (FDOT, Florida Statutes 316.189). Lower limits are anti-democratic and increase crashes, while unjustly fining mostly safe driving motorists.

Education, when presented honestly, can increase safety. Threats and dictatorial ramblings do not qualify as education. Driver's Ed, including training in a real car, should be mandatory in every high school.

Engineering - by far - maintains the biggest impact on traffic safety.

Yet, despite my efforts, county officials ignore proven techniques to increase safety in favor of revenue enhancement.

Most red-light violations result from improperly engineered traffic signals or honest human error.

AAA Michigan re-engineered four dangerous Detroit intersections at about \$35,000 each. They increased signal lens sizes, retimed the lights (including ambers), removed obstructions and painted bolder lane lines.

Results: a 47 percent decrease in crashes and a 50 percent reduction in red-light violations. Extensive, honest research shows on average, cameras can decrease red-light violations by only 40 percent. Photo-enforcement violates due process (not privacy), being able to face your accusers and illegally reverses the burden of proof, while increasing accidents. In reality, those who support cameras have placed power and money above human welfare.

If officials truly care about safety they need to implement a balanced approach, with engineering improvements being the top priority.

Properly engineered traffic signals and posting legitimate speed limits significantly increase driver compliance while producing the greatest safety benefits. Real education follows as second most effective.

Enforcement should be used only as a last resort, with discretion, by live police officers.

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# Arguments favoring red-light

Smile. Big Brother wants a nice snapshot of you, or, more accurately, your license plate.

Camera enforcement in the form of red-light cameras and photo radar may be coming to a neighborhood near you. Proponents – including government officials, police, equipment vendors and insurance interests – claim it's for our "safety." "Cameras reduce accidents and save lives."

Is there an honest need? Proponents insist there's a growing epidemic of red-light and speeding-caused crashes and deaths. Quite the contrary. In all crashes and fatalities, on average, just 2-4 percent occurred from signal violations. The Federal Highway Administration claims 1,114 deaths in 1997 (2.6 percent). Fatalities in 1998 were 928. Despite phenomenal growth in drivers and miles driven between 1994-1998, Florida statistical indicators for red-light running and speeding recorded declines not increases. Speeding caused just 1.77 percent of all accidents in 1998. Clearly, an honest need has not been established.

Can cameras prevent crashes and save lives? Absolutely not. Have cam-



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eras prevented robberies at banks or stores? Cameras snap photos. The fact that camera sites in Arizona have photographed fatal crashes, proves their inability to prevent them.

Furthermore, an Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study, "Automated Enforcement of Traffic Laws," admits, "In some cases, cameras are associated with an increase in the number of rear-end collisions."

The camera or pictures don't lie,

## cameras mostly bogus

derision as well. Would Americans "accept" paying fines to support a foreign company? Redflex of Australia recently purchased most of American Traffic Systems. Electronic Data Systems, which operates New York City's camera program, elicited charges of fraud from Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth in the 1980s. Since cameras cannot improve safety, opinions are irrelevant.

### ■ Money! Money! Money!

Proponents of cameras all profit from their operation. Conflict of interest. Money from fines enhances the coffers of state, county and city police, local governments, camera vendors, and, after a second violation, traffic schools. Campaign contributions by the insurance industry will allow future surcharges on policy holders. Get the picture? It's all about the Benjamins!

■ Fixing the problem. Only 7 percent of drivers crash annually. Over 93 percent drive in a rational and safe manner. Therefore, when a significant number or majority of safe motorists violate a speed limit sign or a traffic light, the fault remains with the traffic

Hollywood has been lying with cameras for 100 years. There occur many documented mistakes associated with camera enforcement. For example, more than 800 people were improperly cited with photo radar tickets in Beaverton, Oregon, in 1994.

■ Violation of Constitutional Rights. "The defendant's right to confront witnesses has long been identified as among the minimum essentials for a fair trial." Florida Supreme Court Justice Barbara Pariente's statement refers to the Sixth Amendment. Camera enforcement cannot produce a real witness, while also violating the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments – due process. Other problems with ticketing the vehicle's owner by mail scheme include inadequate notification and illegal reversal of burden of proof. Most camera bills require the vehicle owner – if not guilty – to prove his/her. Not fair, legal or ethical.

■ Public acceptance. "Acceptance" remains based on misinformation campaigns by biased interests (IIHS). More than 20 locations in this country and Ontario rejected photo radar by 1995. Red-light cameras cause public

control device. When you fix the traffic control devices, you fix the problem. In Detroit, Michigan, AAA funded the re-engineering of four dangerous intersections.

For less than the cost to place cameras at one intersection, they reduced crashes by 47 percent and red-light running by 50 percent.

These results are much better than cameras can accomplish, without violating people's rights. Installing enforcement cameras only creates more problems, often including more crashes and deaths. Allowing cameras will open a Pandora's box of further abuses on the motoring public.

How would our Founding Fathers respond to relinquishing our rights for the mere illusion of "safety"?

With shame and anger. Benjamin Franklin retorted, "They that can give up liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety!"

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## Dismiss 'convoluted logic' of red light camera boosters

**P**alm Beach County Commissioner Burt Aaronson claims cameras can reduce red-light running by 40 percent, which will result in a corresponding 40 percent reduction in crashes and fatalities. The statement shows complete ignorance of real traffic safety.

What causes a red-light violation crash? The primary cause of most of these accidents, ironically, is not the signal violation. People honestly mistiming the yellow and drivers who strategically run the light on purpose almost never cause a crash. Collisions, especially fatal ones, result mainly from inattention, DWI and sometimes police chases.

In Palm Beach and Broward counties, from November 1999 through February 2000, four serious signal violation crashes caused five deaths and one serious injury. Three of these crashes were caused by drunks. The other one resulted from a chase.

Drunk or otherwise-impaired drivers lack the mental and physical faculties required to control their vehicles. But, are we to believe they will miraculously sober up and drive right in the presence of cameras? Ludicrous. Even Palm Beach County Sheriff Robert Neumann admitted that cameras will not prevent crashes by red-light running drunks.

An inattentive, 72-year-old lady collided with me in 1997. She failed to see two large red lights, cars stopped at her side and vehicles crossing the intersection. But, again, according to camera proponents' convoluted logic, she would have magically noticed a camera and stopped.

Other crashes result from "unwarranted, ill-designed or improperly timed traffic signals," according to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, a U.S. DOT guidebook.

Cameras have no power to prevent any crashes. They snap photos, folks, that's all. Photos of crashes at camera sites proves their inability to prevent them. Put the Yamato Road tragedy to rest. A similar fatal crash occurred in Arizona. The difference? The intersection contained cameras, snapping a lovely photo of the carnage. Even worse, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety – despite being pro-camera and originator of so many of the lies you've been hearing – admits that cameras can cause an increase in rear-end collisions. Rear-end collisions resulted in more than 1,666 U.S. fatalities in 1998. Red-light runners killed only 928. (Traffic Safety Facts, p. 106, U.S. DOT).

Proponents mention crash reductions in Howard



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County, Maryland, and Polk County, Florida. They fail to mention the next sentence of the U.S. DOT study: "However, these simple comparisons are not statistically rigorous to conclude that the RLR program will result in crash reductions immediately or in the long run."

There are ethical problems with the Howard study and any others making bogus claims of "fewer crashes" or "lives saved." One year to the next comparisons are a tool of deception, not honest safety trends. Five years of crash data need to be analyzed objectively, from all angles, to produce accurate, reliable conclusions. Camera proponent "studies" are dishonest

manipulation of data to support a political/financial agenda.

New York City started its camera program in 1993. The National Motorists Association petitioned New York two years ago to prove any safety benefits. They cannot. Neither could the U.S. DOT study. However, they certainly know how much money the cameras generated.

I've objectively reviewed information from about a dozen locations, and found no valid evidence of cameras preventing crashes or saving lives. None.

What can cameras accomplish? Allegedly, they can reduce red-light running by about 40 percent, on average. However, most people ticketed are those honestly mistiming the yellow, not "dangerous scofflaws." Besides, proper signal timing can reduce violations even more, without extorting money and violating rights.

Camera enforcement, like the 55 mph speed limit, punishes mostly non-dangerous violators, while doing nothing to improve safety. Furthermore, the ticket-by-mail scheme violates due process (not privacy), being able to face your accusers and illegally reverses the burden of proof. It requires the vehicle owner — if not guilty — to turn in the violator. Cameras increase rear-end collisions, which already kill about 75 percent more people than red-light runners. Cameras can take away the police presence needed to apprehend DWI and reckless drivers. In summary, cameras violate rights and extort money, while decreasing public safety.

Camera enforcement is about power, oppression and, most of all, money. Safety isn't even in the picture.

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# Camera use to enforce red lights rebutted

The Palm Beach Post

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By JANE MUSGRAVE  
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As a truck driver in traffic-crazed South Florida, Delray Beach resident Greg Mauz says it feels like he confronts 8,000 traffic lights a day.

But, he says, that's not what makes him an expert on whether putting cameras at intersections would reduce the number of crashes caused by people running red lights.

That particular expertise comes from spending much of the past eight years gathering information to fight Palm Beach County's near-obsessive interest in persuading the Florida Legislature to pass a bill allowing cameras to serve as traffic cops at intersections throughout the state.

And the 46-year-old knows about obsession.

His information-gathering prompted him to pen a 96-page book titled *Camera Enforcement — Developing the Factual Picture*.

## ► CAMERAS from 1B

Although he readily admits that the book he published with the help of the regulation-wary National Motorists Association isn't movie fodder, he said it debunks one of the biggest myths about intersection cameras.

"I know it's hard for people to believe, but I've proven in my book that cameras actually cause an increase in accidents," he said.

Bill sponsor Rep. Irv Slosberg and bill supporter Palm Beach County Commissioner Burt Aaronson consider Mauz's claims to be ridiculous.

"The insurance industry says lives are saved," Aaronson said. "We're looking to save lives."

For seven years, Aaronson has championed the idea first broached in 1995 by then-County Commissioner Ken Foster, who became enamored with the cameras he saw on a honeymoon trip to England.

Each year, bills have been filed and gone nowhere.

This year, Slosberg is proposing to spread around the money that would be generated from fines paid by those

caught on camera running red lights.

As proposed, the lion's share — an estimated \$13.2 million annually — would be distributed to area agencies on aging to provide transportation to seniors. Other potential beneficiaries are Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which would get \$250,000 annually, and the state's brain and spinal cord injury program, which would get \$500,000.

And, in what some say is an obvious attempt to seek favor from House leaders, Slosberg is also proposing \$3 million be used for Alzheimer's research at a center to be named in memory of House Speaker Johnnie Byrd's father, who died from the disease. In another bill that would dramatically increase traffic fines, Slosberg promises to contribute \$10 million from the boosted fines to Byrd's center.

To Mauz, the entire measure is just a money grab. An Australian study he reviewed found that rear-end crashes more than doubled — from 60 to 139 — after cameras were installed at 41 intersections in the Melbourne area.

Other studies have shown that cameras do nothing to prevent serious accidents, he said. Such crashes are

typically caused by drunks, people who are simply not paying attention or during police chases. In each of those kind of accidents, the person running a red light either could care less if a camera caught him or simply didn't see the red light, much less the camera.

Studies that show 900 people die nationwide each year in crashes caused by red light infractions are overblown, he said. That's only 2 percent of all traffic fatalities, he said.

While questioning Mauz's claims, county traffic engineer Dan Weisberg said he is frustrated with the lack of data on the impact of intersection cameras.

"Early information shows that the number of red light violations goes down but that's not a direct reflection on safety," he said. "I wish there was better information out there."

Still, he said, as he drives around he sees the appalling number of people running red lights and making them stop is a worthwhile goal.

## Mauz disagrees.

"It's not a traffic safety tool," he said. "It's all about taking your money, nothing more."

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