

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

May 20, 1998

RED LIGHT RUNNING CRASHES ARE ON THE INCREASE; CHARACTERISTICS OF RED LIGHT RUNNERS IDENTIFIED

ARLINGTON, VA - Drivers who run red lights are responsible for an estimated 260,000 crashes each year, of which approximately 750 are fatal - and the number is rising. Determining the size of the red light running problem is one aspect of a new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study. The report also profiles red light runners who, compared with other drivers, tend to be younger and have poor driving records and histories of alcohol use. Institute researchers also identify U.S. cities with especially high rates of fatal red light running crashes.

Red light cameras are increasingly being used to enforce traffic laws by automatically photographing vehicles whose drivers deliberately run red lights and ticketing the violators by mail. Several months after red light cameras were introduced in one California city evaluated by the Institute, red light running violations dropped about 42 percent.

On a national basis, fatal motor vehicle crashes at traffic signals increased 19 percent between 1992 and 1996, far outpacing the 6 percent rise in all other fatal crashes. Red light running is a big part of the problem. Institute researchers determined that during this time period there were 3,753 red light running crashes, rising from 702 in 1992 to 809 in 1996, a 15 percent increase.

Characteristics of Red Light Runners

In fatal red light running crashes involving two cars, the violators were more likely than the non-runners to be younger than 30 (43 percent compared with 32 percent) and to have been driving with suspended, revoked, or otherwise invalid driver's licenses. Younger drivers were particularly likely to be unlicensed. Fatally

— MORE —

injured red light running drivers were much more likely than the other drivers in these crashes to have blood alcohol concentrations of 0.10 percent or more (35 percent compared with 6 percent), which is the legal threshold for an alcohol-impaired driving offense in most states.

Cities with High Rates of Red Light Running Crashes

Cities with populations of more than 200,000 accounted for about 34 percent of all fatal red light running crashes during 1992-96. The average crash rate was 2.5 crashes per 100,000 residents for the five-year period, but the rate varied from a high of 8.11 per 100,000 in Phoenix to a low of 0.21 per 100,000 in Oklahoma City. Rounding out the top five cities were Mesa (7.08 per 100,000), Memphis (5.45), Tucson (5.11), and St. Petersburg (4.95).

Red Light Cameras Prove Successful

The use of red light cameras to ticket and deter red light runners is moving beyond the pilot stage, with programs due to be launched in several cities. A recent Institute study of a program in Oxnard, California, shows that red light running violations dropped a total of 42 percent after cameras were introduced at nine intersections, which includes a similar decline at intersections that weren't equipped with them. Plus there was strong public support for red light cameras — 80 percent of Oxnard residents favored their use.

Red light cameras are permitted in 10 states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington) and the District of Columbia. They have long been used in Australia, Europe, and Asia.

Broadcast-quality videotape is available from the Institute.

End of 2-page press release on red light running crashes.

Internet: www.highwaysafety.org