

# Red-light cameras increase crashes, researchers find

**Rather than improving motorist safety, red-light cameras significantly increase crashes and are a ticket to higher auto insurance premiums, researchers at the University of South Florida College of Public Health conclude. The effective remedy to red-light running uses engineering solutions to improve intersection safety, which is particularly important to Florida's elderly drivers, the researchers recommend.**

The report was published this month in the *Florida Public Health Review*, the online journal of the college and the Florida Public Health Association.

“The rigorous studies clearly show red-light cameras don’t work,” said lead author Barbara Langland-Orban, professor and chair of health policy and management at the USF College of Public Health. “Instead, they increase crashes and injuries as drivers attempt to abruptly stop at camera intersections. If used in Florida, cameras could potentially create even worse outcomes due to the state’s high percent of elderly who are more likely to be injured or killed when a crash occurs.”

Red-light cameras photograph violators who are then sent tickets in the mail. Hillsborough County Commissioners unanimously agreed earlier this month to install the cameras at several major intersections in the county. The devices could be adopted by more cities and counties if Florida legislators pave the way by changing a state law this spring.

The USF report highlights trends in red-light running in Florida, summarizes major studies, and analyzes the automobile insurance industry’s financial interest in cameras. Among the findings:

- Traffic fatalities caused by red-light running are not increasing in Florida and account for less than 4 percent of the state’s yearly traffic deaths. In contrast, more than 22 percent of the state’s traffic fatalities occur at intersections for reasons other than red-light running.
- The injury rate from red-light running crashes has dropped by a third in less than a decade, indicating red-light running crashes have been continually declining in Florida without the use of cameras.
- Comprehensive studies from North Carolina, Virginia, and Ontario have all reported cameras are significantly associated with increases in crashes, as well as crashes involving injuries. The study by the Virginia Transportation Research Council also found that cameras were linked to increased crash costs.
- Some studies that conclude cameras reduced crashes or injuries contained major “research design flaws,” such as incomplete data or inadequate analyses, and were conducted by researchers with links to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The IIHS, funded by automobile insurance companies, is the leading advocate for red-light cameras. Insurers can profit from red-light cameras, since their revenues will increase when higher premiums are charged due to the crash and citation increase, the researchers say.

Langland-Orban said the findings have been known for some time. She cites a 2001 paper by the Office of the Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives, reporting that red-light cameras are “a hidden tax levied on motorists.” The report concluded cameras are associated with increased crashes, the timings at yellow lights are often set too short to increase tickets for red-light running, and most research concluding cameras are effective was conducted by one researcher from the IIHS. Since then, studies independent of the automobile insurance industry continue to find cameras are associated with large increases in crashes.

Red-light running can be reduced by engineering improvements that address factors such as signal visibility and timings, wet roads and traffic flow, the USF researchers say. The researchers suggest local governments follow the state's lead in designing roads and improving intersections to accommodate elderly drivers, which would ultimately benefit all drivers.

Source: University of South Florida

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