



The Traffic Safety Camera Program



Frequently Asked Questions

The City of Tucson has implemented a traffic intersection safety program that utilizes automated cameras to enforce speed and red light violations at various locations. The purpose is to improve public safety in the community.

Q: Is photo enforcement a new strategy?

A: No, photo speed and red light enforcement has been used in Europe, England and Canada for over twenty years. Cities in the United States have successfully implemented photo enforcement strategies for nearly as long. In the Phoenix metropolitan area, photo enforcement strategies were widely implemented in the late 1990s. With digital technology, the effectiveness of photo enforcement has improved tremendously.

Q: What is the benefit of a photo enforcement strategy?

A: A comprehensive photo enforcement strategy can reduce crashes, injuries and deaths in our city. Traditional enforcement strategies depend on the ability to deploy officers into an area with the time, tools and training to make stops. These officers are often subject to other calls for service. Additionally, traffic conditions can make it dangerous for the violator, officer and everyone else on the road to initiate a stop.

Photo enforcement does not require that stops be made. Violations are fairly and consistently recorded nearly every time they occur. Photo enforcement does not place anyone at risk, but the violator usually is aware they have been caught due to the flash of the system. This provides an immediate deterrent to the violator. Photo enforcement provides an increased certainty that enforcement will occur.

Q: Is speeding really that big of a problem in Tucson?

A: Yes, it is. Excessive speed was the fatal contributing factor in about 20% of traffic fatalities within Tucson. Failure to reduce or control speed is the highest single cause of all crashes in Tucson. This also includes those drivers following other vehicles too closely, as speed is a factor.

Q: Are red light violations also a problem in Tucson?

A: Yes, they are. The majority of collisions occurring as a result of a red light violation are “right angle” collisions. The “right angle collision is responsible for the highest percentage of deaths and serious injuries of all collisions types.



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Q: What is a speed camera?

A: Speed cameras are electronic devices that are linked to a speed-measuring device, such as a radar unit. When a vehicle travels through the radar above a set speed in excess of the posted speed limit, the high-resolution digital camera captures the violation. The camera takes a photograph of the front of the vehicle to capture the driver's face and from the rear of the vehicle to photograph the license plate.

Q: How do red light cameras work?

A: Red light cameras are systems installed at intersections that continuously monitor for red light violations. Cameras are used to detect when a vehicle enters the intersection after the light has turned red. The violation triggers the camera to take a photograph of the front of the vehicle to capture the driver's face and from the rear of the vehicle to photograph the license plate. The violation, including the vehicle's speed and images of the vehicle proceeding through the red light, are captured as evidence of the violation. Because these systems are able to establish a vehicle's speed, those speeding through intersections may also be detected. Speeding while approaching and going through an intersection contributes to both the number and severity of crashes.

Q: Are these systems accurate?

A: Radar has been a primary speed enforcement tool for police for decades. Radar is accepted as a valid speed measuring system throughout the country. Photo radar systems utilize very narrow beams of radar deployed at specific angles to the roadway. Red light systems are able to capture the vehicle's position when a stoplight turns red to establish that a violation occurred.

Q: How do you determine where a photo radar van will be deployed?

A: The van is most effectively deployed into areas such as school zones to ensure the safety of our children. Also effective are other areas where there is a higher risk of crashes or injuries. These areas may include construction sites where traditional enforcement is often not feasible, major thoroughfares, and neighborhood roadways. Studies have shown that the deployment of photo radar vans significantly reduces collisions; therefore, the areas of deployment continually evolve. The location of the radar vans are publicized on a daily basis on the Tucson Police Department's website, in the local newspaper, and on many radio and TV stations.

Q: Does a photo enforcement system photograph every vehicle?

A: No, the only time a photograph is taken of a vehicle is when the system detects a violation. The cameras are aimed at specific locations to capture the license plate and driver of the violating vehicle. Photo enforcement systems increase the certainty that those who commit violations will have to answer for their poor driving behavior.



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Q: Can my personal information be compromised through a photo enforcement system?

A: The only time any information is captured is when a violation occurs. The information available to the traffic safety camera program vendor is limited to the registered owner of the vehicle along with a photo of the vehicle and driver. Vendor employees are security checked and the hardware as well as the software typically used by the industry prevents information from being copied or disseminated. Law enforcement agencies throughout the country successfully employ private vendors for this work.

Q: At what speed will I receive a citation?

A: Because of factors that include imprecise vehicle speedometer calibration, changing traffic conditions, and the fact that drivers must pay attention to many things besides the speedometer, it is not reasonable to expect that every vehicle will be traveling at the exact speed limit at all times. Due to the greater risk of danger in school zones, citations will be issued for vehicles traveling 5 mph over the speed limit. In all other locations, citations will be issued for vehicles traveling 11 mph over the speed limit. Studies have shown that a driver's chance of being involved in a crash doubles when they exceed the speed limit by 10 mph. Drivers who exercise reasonable care will have no problem keeping their speed within these parameters.

Q: Can I receive citations for other offenses as a result of my red light camera or photo speed citation?

A: Yes, drivers may be found in violation of the mandatory seat belt law, as well as driver license and registration laws, and may also be cited for these offenses. As a reminder, wearing a seat belt is one of the single most important things you can do to ensure your safety in a crash.

Q: Does a Police Officer review my citation?

A: Yes, each individual violation is reviewed by a Tucson Police Officer prior to a citation being issued. A Police Officer confirms the elements of the violation, that the license plate is readable, and that the driver is identifiable, all prior to affirming that the citation should be issued.

Q: Can I contest a photo enforcement citation?

A: The state carries the burden of proving the violation by a preponderance of the evidence. This is the same standard that is required if you were to be stopped by an actual officer and issued a citation. You can request a hearing and the state is required to provide evidence that the photo enforcement equipment was working properly, that the violation occurred, and that you were responsible for the violation.



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Q: Are license plate sprays and covers that are advertised and sold to prevent photography of plates by photo detection cameras prohibited by law?

A: Yes. Arizona law (ARS 28-2354) requires that, "A person shall maintain each license plate so it is clearly legible." The sprays and covers themselves are not illegal. The act of displaying an illegible or obscured license plate is. An officer who observes a vehicle with a license plate that is not clearly readable may issue a citation for this offense. In addition to this, many of the products on the market are ineffective in obscuring the license plate from being legible in photographs taken by cameras with today's digital technology.

Q: Will photo enforcement replace police officers doing traffic enforcement?

A: Photo enforcement enhances the work that traffic officers already do. It is not intended to replace the expectation that officers actively enforce traffic violations. Photo enforcement allows officers to focus their efforts in areas without a photo system. There is no plan to reduce the expectation that officers enforce traffic violations.

Q: How much money can the city expect to make from photo enforcement?

A: Our photo enforcement program was established to improve safety on our roadways. The program's purpose is to reduce speeding and red light running, both of which are the cause of thousands of crashes and many injuries and deaths in Tucson. To run an effective program, the city incurs increased staffing and administrative costs, which must be considered but are not formally recompensed. Thus far, with the exclusion of the staffing and administrative costs, the fees from program fines have offset other program expenses.

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has several documents on photo enforcement accessible on the Internet. Similarly, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety maintains information on photo enforcement. Questions may also be directed to the Tucson Police Department website or to the Traffic Division at 791-4440.