

Putting a stop to red light running

RED LIGHT RUNNING is a serious problem in Iowa and across the country. In 1998, red light running accounted for about 89,000 crashes, 80,000 injuries, and nearly 1,000 deaths in the United States. The cost to the public is estimated to be as much as seven billion dollars per year.

Two possible strategies for reducing red light running are presented here. First, locations with a poor record of red light running crashes should be studied for possible engineering intersection and/or signal problems and any problems should be corrected. Second, counties and communities can establish a public awareness campaign with the assistance of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Stop Red Light Running program.

Engineering solutions

Before investing money in a public awareness campaign or considering other strategies, officials should first make sure that a red light running problem is not the result of an engineering issue.

Some locations may suffer from high incidence of red light running crashes because of engineering problems related to the intersection or the improper installation or use of signs and signals. If this is the case, an engineering solution is needed to solve the problem.

Poor intersection sight distance, improper signal timing, and other engineering considerations should be attended to as a first step in putting a stop to red light running.

Raising public awareness

If the problem is not one that can be solved through engineering, a public awareness campaign may be helpful. FHWA surveys have indicated that most people who run red lights do so because they

are in a hurry. Those same people would probably agree that the time saved by avoiding a red light is not worth a human life. Thus, it is critical that drivers recognize that they may be able to prevent a crash by driving the proper speed, by being aware of other drivers, and by observing all traffic controls, including red lights.

The FHWA has formed a partnership with organizations at federal, state, and local levels to raise awareness of the dangers of red light running and to help reduce related fatalities. The campaign, called the Stop Red Light Running program, has contributed to a 7.5 percent reduction in red light running fatalities and a 9 percent decrease in total red light running crashes in the last two years.

As part of the initiative, the annual National Stop on Red Week was established. This event provides local communities the opportunity to tie their message in with the national program in order to expand the results of their efforts. (This year the National Stop on Red Week took place October 8–14, but counties and communities can establish similar events any time.)

For more information

Lots of red light running information and community stop red light running campaign materials are available through the FHWA website at <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/programs/srlr.htm>.

Some information for this article was provided by Patrick Hasson, Federal Highway Administration.

Some agencies are using red light cameras and video to monitor trouble spots.

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