

Red Light Photo Enforcement FAQs

1. Q: Do red light running cameras really reduce crashes at intersections?

A: Red Light Photo Enforcement reduces crashes at monitored intersections approximately 40%. The technology tends to produce generalized changes in driver behavior, so violations and crashes decline throughout the area where cameras are used, not just at the specific intersections equipped with cameras. (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety; IIHS, 2002)

2. Q: Why don't the Police Department use existing personnel for this enforcement?

A: Each year red light violations account for 8% of the total traffic summonses issued by officers in our city. Newport News police officers issued 1,650 red light violation summonses in 2006, 1,600 red light violation summonses in 2007, and 2,095 red light violation summonses in 2008. Cameras act as a force multiplier for the Police Department. The cameras will contribute to public safety at their designated locations 24 hours a day and free the police officer to address other community issues.

3. Q: If ticketing drivers reduces crashes, why doesn't the Police Department enforce more red light running violations?

A: Cameras reduce the danger of red light enforcement to officers and the public. Officers trying to enforce red light violations may have to travel against traffic, increasing the likelihood of a collision. The police department does not have enough officers to enforce every intersection 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. The camera has the ability to capture violations in the absence of officers.

4. Q: Do cameras photograph every vehicle passing through an intersection?

A: No. Cameras are set so that only those vehicles that enter the intersection after the light has turned red are photographed. Vehicles entering the intersection on yellow and are still in the intersection when the light turns red are not photographed. The camera system only takes pictures when a violation occurs.

5. Q: What kind of violation will be issued and what would the fine be?

A: Virginia State Code 15.2-968.1 mandates the violation as a driver responsibility. It is presumed that the owner of the vehicle was the driver at the time of the violation. Red light violations are handled similar to a parking violation. There is no insurance liability and no DMV implication or points associated with the driver or owner of the vehicle. By law, the civil fine cannot exceed \$50.

6. Q: How will I know which intersections have red light cameras?

A: Legislation enacted by the 2007 General Assembly requires that localities place conspicuous signs within 500 feet of the intersection where a red light running camera is installed. Localities also are required to conduct a public awareness program advising the public that a photo enforcement system is being implemented or expanded. All intersections are listed on the **PHOTO***Safe* information web page.

7. Q: What happens when a funeral procession or emergency vehicle continues through a red light at an intersection that it is photo enforced?

A: Special circumstances such as a funeral processions will be rejected by officers. Emergency vehicle generated violations (Police, Fire, EMS) **will be reviewed** by officers in the interest of public safety. All violations are screened and reviewed individually before a determination of a violation of law or policy is made.

8. Q: Who will determine what constitutes a violation?

A: All violations are reviewed and certified by a Sworn Police Officer. Any vehicle that enters an intersection, including the crosswalks, after the light has turned red is in violation and subject to fine.

9. Q: How is the timing interval determined between the red, yellow and green traffic lights at an intersection?

A: The City of Newport News Department of Traffic Engineering is responsible for determining the traffic light timing intervals. Times at signals is determined based on variables such as the posted speed limit, typical deceleration rates of vehicles, the grade of the road (uphill or downhill), the width of the intersection, and the amount of time it takes a driver to see the yellow signal and react (perception & reaction time). All traffic signal timing has been evaluated and approved by the department of traffic engineering and reviewed by VDOT in accordance with VDOT guidelines.

10. Q: Isn't the main purpose of red light cameras to make money?

A: No. The objective of the **PHOTOSafe** enforcement program is to improve intersection safety. Signs and publicity campaigns required by the 2007 General Assembly warn motorists that photo enforcement is in use. Revenue is generated by fines paid by drivers who continue to run red lights. Fines for red light violations in Virginia are limited to \$50 per violation by legislation. Independent audits of red light camera enforcement across the country have found that these programs generally do not generate excess revenue. Camera equipment costs vary based on the type of camera, the complexity of the intersection, and technical requirements.

A typical red light camera system with installation, maintenance, and monitoring costs more than \$100,000. The City of Newport News will incur limited financial liability (no upfront costs) and will maintain a "cost neutral" program. The monetary impact to the city is a fixed monthly fee paid to the camera company. **The camera company does not get paid on a per ticket basis.** Newport News tax payers and law abiding (or safe drivers) will not absorb the cost of the automated systems. In short, the violators alone will pay for the cameras.

11. Q: Does the system enforce running right turns on red?

A: Yes. Virginia law requires all vehicles to stop on a red light signal. Right turns on red are permitted unless otherwise posted. The camera will capture right turn violations on vehicles that proceed without coming to a full stop. The sensors will detect violations in the right turn lanes being monitored and activate the photo enforcement system. Officers will review each captured offense and determine if the vehicle stopped and proceeded safely in accordance with Virginia law.

12. Q: What happens if my vehicle is caught running a red light?

A: The photo enforcement system captures the violation. The contracted company reviews and validates the violation and sends it to the police department. A sworn law enforcement officer reviews the evidence captured by the system and either accepts the violation for civil penalty or dismisses the violation due to circumstances that are either acquired by the monitoring system or observed in the video evidence. If the officer accepts the violation, he or she will then obtain the vehicle owner's information for mailing of the notice and \$50 fine. The registered owner of the vehicle will receive the violation notice in the mail with instructions for viewing the violation.

13. Q: How do I review the violation and pay the fine?

A: You will be provided with three still photographs of your vehicle on the printed violation notice. You can review the red light violation via the internet at www.photonotice.com. You can access your violation by entering your violation and license plate numbers and the city code (NPNWVA). Both video and still photo evidence is available for review. The owner/driver can arrange for an opportunity to meet with a **PHOTO***Safe* program officer to review the evidence and discuss the red light running violation. Lastly, the vehicle owner/driver can request a court date for the evidence to be heard in the Newport News General District Traffic Court. The court arrangements will be made by a **PHOTO***Safe* officer.

14. Q: Does the City of Newport News have a local ordinance as required by Virginia State Code 15.2-968.1?

A: Yes, Newport News City Code Sec. 26-9.1 authorizes the use of red-light photo monitoring systems.

15. Q: Why did the City of Newport News give drivers a 30-day red light running warning period at the location where a camera system is activated?

A: Red light running is a violation of the law at every signalized intersection in the City of Newport News. The warning period only applies to the use of the automated enforcement camera system. The 30-day warning period is considered a part of the public awareness process for implementing or expanding the automated enforcement program.

16. Q: What happens if an officer issues a summons to the driver of a vehicle and the red light camera also captures the vehicle during the red light running violation?

A: An officer's summons takes precedence over the over the camera violation citation. The officer will identify and issue the summons to the driver.

17. Q: What happens when the camera captures a Newport News city vehicle?

A: Drivers are not given a "free pass" because it is a city owned vehicle. The driver is responsible for the operation of the vehicle and each matter is handled as a personnel issue, resulting in implications up to termination of employment.

18. Q: What happens when the camera captures a commercial motor vehicle or a vehicle that is owned by a company or state or local agency that has a fleet of vehicles?

A: The violation notice is mailed to the registered owner the same as any other vehicle.

19. Q: What if I still have additional questions?

A: Contact the **PHOTO*Safe*** Program Coordinator by phone at (757) 928-4282 or by email at photosafe@nngov.com.