

Photo Enforcement FAQs

What does “photo enforcement” mean?

“Photo enforcement” is law enforcement technology used to enforce traffic safety laws. It enables officers to monitor, detect and deter dangerous driving behaviors, such as red-light running, speeding, illegally passing a stopped school bus or crossing railroad tracks while the crossing signal is active.

How long has photo enforcement been around?

Law enforcement agencies in the U.S. have relied on photo enforcement to decrease dangerous driving behaviors since the late 1990s. Photo enforcement has been used internationally to improve roadway safety since the 1960s.

When should photo enforcement be used?

Photo enforcement is designed for use on roadways with a history of crashes or violations resulting from dangerous driving behaviors, such as red-light running, speeding or illegally passing a stopped school bus. It should be considered after all other safety options have been analyzed, implemented, and/or optimized. For instance, prior to the installation of a photo enforcement system, intersections and roadways should be well designed from a safety standpoint, speed limits should be set to the appropriate level for the roadway and yellow-light timing should be reviewed. If the danger still exists after all appropriate safety options have been optimized, photo enforcement could help curb the problem.

What are the benefits of photo enforcement?

- **Automatic Detection:** Photo enforcement cameras are fully automated. No action is required by an officer at the scene to trigger or activate the system.
- **24/7 deterrent:** The presence of photo enforcement causes drivers to think twice before initiating any risky maneuvers. The camera systems serve as deterrents to breaking the law, 24/7.
- **Police Force Multiplier:** Photo enforcement programs serve as “police force multipliers” enabling local officers to refocus their energy on high-priority tasks while ensuring the safety and security of problematic intersections.
- **Crash Prevention:** Photo enforcement programs help prevent crashes by reducing traffic delays and resource allocation by police, fire, and EMT resources. More importantly, automated enforcement cameras save lives.

What types of photo enforcement systems are authorized in Oregon by state law?

- **Red Light:** Used to monitor and detect red-light running incidents. This is among the most popular applications of crashes that result from red light running, also referred to as “T-bone” crashes that are considered the most deadly.
- **Speeding/Highway Worker Safety:** Fixed (stationary) or mobile photo enforcement systems monitor speeding incidents on a wide variety of roadways, including highways, school zones, busy intersections, and areas with heavy pedestrian traffic.
- **Stop Sign:** Just like red light, photo enforcement can deter stop sign running.

How does photo enforcement work?

Photo enforcement is an automated technology that law enforcement agencies use to detect and record dangerous driving behaviors. Typically, a camera system monitors approaching traffic. The system is only triggered to capture data of a vehicle and the driver including a close-up image of the license plate, date and time of incident and lane number when a potential violation is detected. All data is transmitted and encrypted to a secure central processing center, and digitally signed, preventing interception and manipulation of the evidence while ensuring the highest level of protection to the chain of custody. Following a comprehensive review process, law enforcement agencies are provided with secure evidence packages. A sworn officer reviews and approves the evidence to determine if a violation is warranted.

Is photo enforcement effective?

Photo enforcement is one of the most effective deterrents available, and it is among the only practical means of holding violators accountable on a 24/7 basis. A sampling of studies supporting effectiveness include:

- The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety conducted one of the most comprehensive studies assessing the effectiveness of red light photo enforcement in 2011. It found a 24% reduction in fatalities across 14 cities with red light camera programs operating from 2004 to 2008. If similar programs been operating in all large cities during that period, 815 deaths may have been prevented.
- Research from the Texas Transportation Institute in 2011 suggested red light cameras helped reduce the number of crashes at intersections. Findings demonstrated automated enforcement offers an effective means of preventing crash-related deaths and injuries.

- Speed camera programs in three municipalities (District of Columbia, Scottsdale, AZ, and Montgomery County, MD) contributed to a 70% to 88% decline of drivers traveling more than 10 mph faster than posted speed limits (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety).
- Maryland's Safe Zones program – a speed camera program designed to safeguard roadside workers against speeding vehicles – contributed to an 80% reduction in speed camera violations and a 10-year low in work-zone-related crashes and fatalities (2012).

I heard photo enforcement is an invasion of privacy. Is that true?

Photo enforcement does not constitute an invasion of privacy, and numerous courts around the country have upheld this view. When drivers receive their licenses, they agree to abide by traffic laws on public roadways intended to protect their safety and the safety of others. Any data captured by a photo enforcement camera is only used for law enforcement purposes.

Are photo enforcement cameras recording and saving all activity 24/7/365?

No, photo enforcement cameras continually monitor traffic, but they are only triggered to capture and save data if a potential violation is detected. Records of violations are only kept for a specified duration established by the respective law enforcement or government agency.

What exactly are the cameras capturing?

Photo enforcement systems are set to capture data specified by the law enforcement agency within local, state, and federal guidelines. This data may include photographic stills and video of the vehicle, the license plate, and in some cases, the driver. It can also include the date, time, location, and speed and lane number of the incident.

Is the data captured by photo enforcement cameras really secure?

Yes, all data is transmitted and encrypted to a secure central processing server and digitally signed, preventing interception and manipulation of the evidence while ensuring the highest level of protection to the chain of custody. All original images and data are secured in a data vault for safekeeping.

Aren't cameras just about raising money for the city?

The primary goal of a photo enforcement system is to protect the safety of citizens who utilize the roadways. Since photo enforcement systems are intended to serve as deterrents, successful programs often see a reduction in citations (and therefore a reduction in the amount of money collected). A reduction in photo enforcement revenue is actually a sign the deterrent effort is working.

Who is responsible for issuing tickets?

The local law enforcement agency is the only entity that can determine if a violation occurred and a citation is warranted. The photo red light monitoring company provides officers with secure, comprehensive evidence packages that offer the situational awareness needed to assess whether a ticket should be issued.

What happens when a driver gets a ticket resulting from a photo enforcement violation?

A photo enforcement violation is treated just like any other traffic violation. The driver will be required to contest or pay the citation. Instructions for both options are relayed with the ticket.

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