

Running On Red

The traffic light was such a good, necessary, idea that it was invented before cars and used to control the movement of pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles. The first automatic, electric traffic light was invented and in use in the 1920s. Traffic lights borrowed their concept from railroad signals, originally using two colors; a third was added later. The intent of the signal colors was quite clear:

Green meant "Go"
Yellow meant "Caution"
Red meant "Stop"

Unfortunately, too many modern drivers think the following:

Green means "Go"
Yellow means "Go Faster"
Red means "Keep Going"

Many drivers ignore the intent of traffic lights. They don't value their purpose to maintain a safe, effective flow of motorists. Traffic lights that are operating normally are extremely effective. They can manage the flow of autos, trucks, SUVs, motorcycles, busses, tractor-trailers and other self-propelled vehicles. Their effectiveness is diminished only by malfunction or by drivers who routinely decide to disobey the devices.

The problem is simple. Selfishness and self-interest often trumps safety. Different groups regularly poll drivers about their automobile operating habits. The answers reveal some interesting items:

- Many drivers routinely witness other drivers running red lights
- A significant number of drivers admit to running red lights themselves
- The most frequent reasons for running red lights were because the driver was in a hurry, followed by drivers not noticing the light
- Most drivers believe that traffic light violations are rarely punished
- A majority of drivers believe that the consequences of running a light are minor

Driver beliefs clash with reality. Running red lights cause serious problems. The practice leads to the number one reason for collisions and a leading source of traffic fatalities. The reason for the latter is that such accidents usually involve the front of one vehicle striking the side of another or a "T" collision. Vehicle safety devices and vehicle construction are ineffective in protecting persons whose cars are struck on their sides, especially if the other car has sped up to beat or ignore a red light.

Increasingly, towns and cities have turned to technology to help with the chronic problem. Traffic light cameras, though very expensive, are an effective way to reduce traffic light violations and intersection collisions. The cameras are triggered when an auto enters an intersection on a red light. It takes a photo of the vehicle's license plate and traffic tickets are sent to the owner. However, because of their expense, cameras can only be used on a limited basis.

If you're on the road, make the decision that improves traffic flow, increases safety and reduces insurance costs...remember that red means "stop."

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