

Are cameras reducing accidents?

by Lance Burris

Twenty-three states presently employ red light cameras, to the dismay of many motorists who have received traffic tickets in the mail.

This program, according to the states who participate, is aimed at reducing safety problems at urban and rural intersections.

An added advantage, they say, is that the cameras produce monetary gain for the cities and towns.

Of the states who have bought the cameras, 23 are facing class-action law suits filed that questions the benefits of the program.

The suits allege the process is a violation of their rights and that the effort has not stopped traffic accidents.

Attorneys tell the courts that their clients' 5th, 6th and 14th Amendment rights have been violated.

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In the city of Lafayette, Louisiana, a suit is demanding that the city dismantle the cameras and return money to those who have been cited and fined.

Red light cameras, they claim, violate constitutional rights by having only a

picture to prove guilt, the inability to confront one's accuser and the unfairness of the vehicle's owner getting the ticket whether they were driving or not.

In addition, they say the cameras take away rights they would have if they were ticketed by a police officer.

Proponents want the cameras to stay, claiming that a ticket is issued because the driver did something wrong.

Those in favor also claim that the camera frees up an officer to work in neighborhoods plagued by high crime and drugs.

A U.S. Department of Transportation study of 132 red light camera sites in seven different jurisdictions, before and after installing the red light cameras, shows a significant decrease in



right-angle crashes (from 40 to 14), but an increase in rear-end collisions (7 to 38.) The most dangerous type of accident, the T-Bone, also declined once the cameras were up.

According to a report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 22 percent of all traffic accidents in the U.S. are caused by drivers running red lights.

Every year these accidents kill 800 people and cause \$7 million in property damage, medical bills, lost productivity and insurance hikes. The report states that red light violations have increased by 10 percent since the 1980s. Because of this, more cities

are installing the red light cameras.

Are these cameras a violation of a driver's rights? Does a driver have certain unalienable rights under the constitution? Is it an invasion of privacy? Do the benefits of the program outweigh any criticism or outcry against it?

These are questions that will have to be answered in a court of law.

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