PLACER INSURANCE AGENCY

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News Blast

Automotive

The Facts About Red-Light Traffic Cameras

RED-LIGHT cameras are able to take photos of vehicles illegally passing through intersections when the light is red, to provide evidence for law enforcement officials.

While authorities say these cameras contribute to public safety, many drivers say they only scare them into making sudden stops that could cause rear-end collisions during yellow lights – and they may be right, to a degree.

Researchers say that rear-end crashes are more common at intersections with red-light cameras, but they also tend to have fewer right-angle crashes. The overall rate is mixed enough that they cannot provide a definitive average by lumping the two together.

History

Red-light cameras have been used in the U.S. since the 1980s. The first cameras used film, which was later reviewed by law enforcement. Digital systems started appearing in the 2000s and are now used exclusively.

How the cameras work

These devices are usually installed inside metal boxes, which are affixed to intersection poles in high-accident areas.

There are usually inductive loops set below the pavement to measure the vehicle's speed as it travels through the intersection.

This helps determine whether the vehicle would have been able to stop before going through the intersection. Two photos are taken for each incident for this purpose.

Details the camera records are the location of the incident, the time, the date and the speed of the vehicle.

In some cases, the entire incident may be captured in a video clip instead of a series of photos. For law enforcement to issue a ticket, there must be one photo of the vehicle entering the intersection and passing through it while the light is red.

An officer will review the data and images to determine whether a citation should be issued. Vehicle owners can challenge the citations if they feel the information is incorrect.

Researchers say that nearly 40% of violations happen within one-fourth of a second of the light turning red.

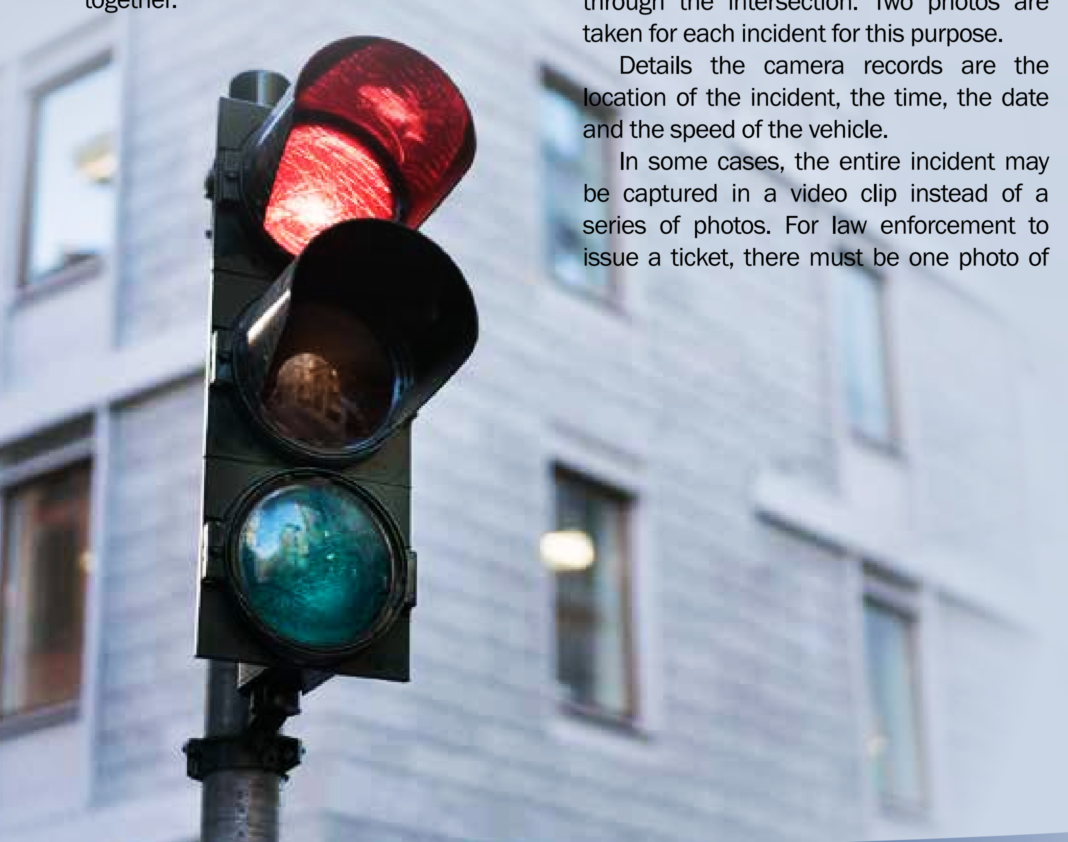
About 80% of incidents happen within one second of the light changing to red.

Some camera systems allow grace periods up to one-half of a second if drivers go through the intersection at the same time the light is changing to red.

The takeaway

While it's good to know your rights concerning the use of red-light camera tickets, you should always practice safe driving, particularly at intersections.

Never run a red light, and be aware if a light is turning yellow and make the appropriate and safe decision about whether to stop or proceed with caution. ❖



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Protecting Your Belongings

Four Thefts That Show Not All Thieves Are Stupid

WHILE THE majority of people live their lives honestly and don't steal and cheat, unfortunately there are plenty of unscrupulous people in society that have no qualms about stealing from you.

And while many people think that overall, thieves are stupid, many of them are calculating and know when to strike. Often, these are crimes of opportunity, and below are some common ploys smart thieves have been employing recently.

1. The long-term parking trick

Thieves regularly cruise the long-term parking lots of airports, to not only steal things from the cars, but also to get ahold of car registrations in the glove compartment. They then drive to the owner's home and rob them.

The robbers will often stake out the property first for a day to make sure nobody is actually home, and then they strike.

What to do: Don't leave your registration and insurance cards in the car if you are leaving it in long-term parking. Also, you may also want to consider leaving the garage door opener at home.

2. The GPS home robbery

Here's another disturbing tactic. When people are parked at a long-term event, like a concert or fair, thieves cruising the parking lot look for vehicles with a GPS in plain sight. They break into the car and steal the GPS, plug it into their own car and have the GPS provide the directions to the victim's home, which they then burgle.

The thieves know that the owner of the car is at the event and likely won't be home for a few hours, so they can take their time and make off with the victim's valuables.

What to do: Instead of programming your home address into the GPS, instead program a nearby location, like your regular grocery store or gas station. Also, you should stash your GPS out of sight so that it's not such a tempting target.

3. Stolen phone, drained bank account

One of the worst things that can happen to someone is to have their purse stolen. What do most people keep in their purses? Wallets, cell phone and keys to their home, along with a number of sundry other items.

One woman whose handbag was stolen with those items in it had her husband's phone number under "hubby" in her phone contacts. When she called him from a pay phone, he told her that he'd received a text from her asking about their ATM card PIN number, which he sent. They checked their account and found out that the thief had withdrawn $400.

What to do: Use people's names in your contacts lists and not designations like Mom, Dad or Sweety. Also, if you receive a text from a loved one asking for sensitive information, call them back instead of sending a text message.

4. Stolen purse, burgled home

Sometimes people are careless about their purses when shopping. They leave them in the shopping cart while walking a short distance to grab something from a shelf.

One woman had her purse stolen from a cart when she'd left it sitting there unattended. She reported it stolen to the store management and when she got home, she got a call from store security, saying they had her purse and wallet, although it had been emptied of its cash.

But, when she got to the store, she was told they hadn't called her. Suspecting something was amiss, she hurried home only to find out that her home had been burgled. The thieves had made the call knowing she'd leave to get her purse back.

What to do: If you find yourself in a similar situation and get a call from a store, you should look up the store number and call them back. Better still, never leave your purse unattended while shopping. ❖

Homeowners' Associations

Belong to an HOA? Know Your Insurance Obligations

IF YOU RESIDE in a community that's part of a homeowners' association (HOA), you should understand what the association's insurance obligations are relative to your own.

If you don't carefully assess this dynamic, you could find yourself with a coverage gap if you assume that the association's insurance covers something it actually doesn't.

HOA rules usually require that all residents within the association's jurisdiction become members and pay a fee. Associations can create their own bylaws for the community or building, and sometimes hire an outside property management company in order to enforce maintenance and other standards.

Know who is responsible for what

Your goal should be to ensure you have no coverage gaps. Start by reviewing your HOA's bylaws and other documents, like CC&Rs.

In some cases, your HOA's rules might stipulate how much of a certain type of coverage you should carry or even which company you need to buy your policy from. It's important to know this so you can judge whether a given condo or association is the right fit for you and to avoid penalties down the road.

Condominiums

The HOA owns the building and you own the property inside your condo. Typically, the HOA is responsbile for:

- Main utilities running through the building,
- Elevators and stairwells,
- Garbage facilities, and
- The lobby and hallways throughout the building.

For condomiums, two types of HOA coverage are common:

Studs-out coverage – The most common condo HOA coverage essentially includes everything outside of your unit's drywall.

The insurance would pay for damage to the building, like leaking roofs, an elevator breakdown or a tree falling into it.

Your insurance likely would cover everything inside your unit, including structural elements such as walls, fixtures and flooring.

All-in coverage – This protects the basic building and common areas plus the structural elements and fixtures in your own unit.

HOA all-in coverage likely means you'd need less coverage against property damage, as the only property you'd be responsible for are personal belongings.

Just don't skimp on the personal liability portion. A water leak or condo fire can become a much bigger loss in a condominium building since both tend to spread to other units.

If that happens, it's no longer a simple home insurance claim, but a potentially costly liability claim.

This is why many HOAs require homeowners to maintain a minimum level of personal liability.

Homes

If you own a single-family home, you will need to have traditional home insurance, as the HOA does not insure your dwelling.

The HOA most likely only owns community amenities, such as:

- Recreational facilities, like a clubhouse and tennis courts,
- Gates to or inside the community, and
- Streets, if they are private.

Your policy would include the pipes leading from the street into your house, your yard up to the street, the dwelling and contents.

The underinsured HOA

Sometimes HOAs don't carry enough insurance and members have to make up for the shortfall through assessments, which can be steep in the event of a significant loss.

For HOA members, insurers offer "loss assessment" coverage, which will pay your share if the association does not have sufficient insurance to cover a loss.

One last thing...

If you are a member of an HOA, be sure to ask us about a premium discount. Even if your current insurer doesn't offer an HOA discount, we may still be able to negotiate a lower price. ❖

Asset Protection

Why Affluent People are More Prone to Being Sued

BECAUSE AFFLUENT people have a lot to lose, they make attractive lawsuit targets for attorneys who represent injured parties.

This is why it is extremely important for the affluent to consider their insurance seriously. Nobody wants to lose their entire net worth and future wages because of a very bad incident.

However, this risk must be addressed before an incident happens and before it is too late to get coverage. There is no legal way to pre-date a coverage change, and dealing with a shortfall of insurance is very unpleasant and a life-altering experience.

What can happen?

All one has to do is go to Google Scholar to view the thousands of cases that have judgements of more than a million dollars.

Although the most common incident is an auto accident, lawsuits can arise from a myriad of circumstances ranging from swimming pool drownings to social media libel accusations – and everything in between.

Whether incidents are legitimate or not, people know that affluent people have money, and, because of this, they are targets.

Is bankruptcy a way out?

Bankruptcy is harder to enter for affluent people, because courts do not grant bankruptcy to those whose assets exceed their debts. Asset movements can be traced, and hiding money is not a solution.

Even if a wealthy person qualifies for bankruptcy due to a very large judgement, they will still lose much of their assets, and their credit will be damaged for at least seven years.

Bankruptcy can also adversely affect a person's employment, especially if their employer performs an employment credit check. Bankruptcy can also affect business owners, because it hinders their ability to get loans or reasonable interest rates.

Attorneys

When there is more at stake, attorneys will spend more time on a case. Attorneys in these cases often work for a contingency of about 30%. Consequently, they have a lot of skin in the game.

They have a lot to go after, which includes your assets and your wages. They can wear you down until they get what they want or what they think the case is worth. They can emotionally drain you through this process. If they do not get what they want, they will file a lawsuit against you, which can put you in a difficult situation.

Insurance protection

Insurance effectively applies in serious incidents only if you have a lot of coverage, which means an umbrella policy that covers you above and beyond the amounts of coverage provided by your auto and homeowner's liability policies.

The more coverage you have, the more protection you have against losing your assets and having your wages garnished. Affluent people should carry at least $5 million of umbrella insurance coverage, although a few insurance companies offer $50 million of coverage or more for the very wealthy.

There are no rules about how much coverage you should get, and getting only the amount of your net worth may not be enough, since injured parties can still come after you once your insurance company has paid its policy limits.

Discuss coverage amounts with us.

Legal protection

The best part about an umbrella policy is the legal protection that you will receive from insurance companies and their attorneys, who know how to manage these incidents.

Actually, insurance companies on average spend significantly less than someone would on their own, simply because they have the experience and expertise to handle these claims. They will manage your case and will pay damages up to your policy limits. This takes a significant load off of everyone who has the misfortune of enduring this process.

Successful people have too much going on in their lives and too much to lose. This is why it is extremely important to address insurance issues as your finances change, and not to wait for a serious incident to turn your life upside down. ❖