

Yes, You Can Still Ignore That Red-Light Camera Ticket

[Dennis Romero](#) | January 21, 2014 | 7:30am

UPDATE: The People v. Goldsmith ruling has once again created questions about whether or not you have to pay your red-light camera ticket. Pretty much, you still don't. But for more detail, here's [everything you need to know about ignoring your red-light camera ticket](#).

It's one of the most-asked questions we get at *L.A. Weekly*.

Can you still ignore red-light camera tickets? We wrote in 2011 that the answer is yes, but is that still true?

The answer is yes, with some fine print. Here's the deal:

Way back then, the L.A. County Superior Court system decided that it would not report your lack of action on red-light camera tickets to the DMV.

If you get almost any other moving-violation ticket and you don't a) pay the fine and b) go to court, you'll get in trouble on two levels: a) the court will ultimately report it to the DMV as a moving violation conviction and b) you'll likely get your license suspended and/or get slapped with a warrant for failing to appear.

Lucky for you, the court system decided to treat these robocops differently.

It decided that it can't be proven that you promised to appear for a red-light camera ticket. They're mailed out, not issued on the side of the road by an officer. So how do they know you received it? You didn't sign a ticket, like you would with a live cop.

So the courts don't tell the DMV to suspend your license. You don't have to show up. You don't have to pay up. And you don't have to acknowledge it.

That doesn't stop many smaller cities from continuing to issue those \$480 tickets. Even with municipalities taking home only about 30 percent of that, they're money makers, says Jay Beeber, the TV writer and producer who got the city of L.A. to tear out its own red-light cameras.

How do the cities do it? Intimidation.

"If the driver still does not answer after a number of threat letters, the court will send that to a collection agency," Beeber says. "They will not notify the DMV."

Indeed, a no-show, no-pay situation will go to collection agency GC Services. But you can ignore its threatening notices with impunity, [criminal defense attorney Mark A. Gallagher](#) told us.

"You can ignore a red-light ticket and get away with it," he says. "But you have to do it right."

Gallagher's first rule: The ticket has to have been issued by an L.A. County law enforcement agency for a location inside the county. If you got it in Orange County or in any other area outside L.A. county lines you're out of luck.

His second rule: Don't mess with it. In other words, if you go online and set a court date for the ticket, then you've acknowledged it and basically promised to appear. Now you're on the hook for the fine and coming to court.

Gallagher:

You have to be careful if you've done anything with the ticket. If you got an extension or a court date, now you can't ignore it. You're punished for doing the right thing.

Before doing that, he says, "Throw the ticket in trash can, throw the collection letter in the trash, and nothing bad will happen."

[Added at 11:44 a.m.]: Our experts say that the collection agency does not ding your credit reports if you ignore the bill. Beeber: "The collection agency does not notify a credit reporting agency."

"Nothing bad happens," Gallagher concurs.

Dennis Romero is an *L.A. Weekly* staff writer. He formerly worked at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Los Angeles Times*, where he participated in Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the L.A. riots. His work has appeared in *Rolling Stone* online, *the Guardian* and, as a young stringer, the *New York Times*.