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Peoria will deactivate red-light cameras on Oct. 3

by **Lisa Halverstadt** - Sept. 14, 2011 04:11 PM
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Peoria's red-light cameras will stop snapping photos of violators Oct. 3.

The city will not renew its contract with Redflex Traffic Systems after learning from police that crashes at monitored intersections actually increased during the three-year pilot program.

Collisions at the four intersections with red-light cameras saw an average uptick of 29 percent, Peoria police said in a Tuesday presentation to City Council.

Red-light violations did drop during the pilot period from 2008 to 2010, an average of 64 percent, Police Chief Roy Minter Jr. said.

The goal of the pilot program, which began in January 2008, was to decrease crashes and violations.

"We're disappointed that's not what we ultimately saw in the data," Peoria police Cmdr. Doug Hildebrandt said.

Council members decided to let their contract with Redflex expire at the recommendation of police and at the urging of Councilman Ron Aames, who also made a presentation.

Peoria is the fourth Valley city not to renew its photo-enforcement contract in the past year. Tempe shut off its speed and red-light cameras in July and Avondale terminated its contract last year. Glendale also opted not to continue a two-year pilot program without adding permanent cameras.

In the West Valley, Surprise and El Mirage continue to use cameras. Figures released to *The Republic* show Peoria did not profit from photo-enforcement violations in the city.

Last year, Peoria received nearly \$300,000 from red-light citations but ended up with about a \$3,194 loss when staff costs and payments to the Scottsdale-based Redflex were factored in.

Police have said the goal was never to make money but to make Peoria streets safer.

"Our interest was to see a reduction in violations, which would indicate we changed driver behavior," said Peoria police Lt. Doug Steele, who spent months reviewing photo-enforcement data.

Steele's analysis found the number of drivers running red lights decreased from more than 18,000 in 2008 to about 5,000 last year. Some of the drop coincided with an increase in yellow-light times at some Peoria intersections. The city extended the time in which the lights at some intersections remain yellow, which police said contributed to a decrease in violations.

The police chief concluded his department had not achieved its most important goal: to reduce crashes. After the police presentation, Aames showed a slideshow of his own.

The councilman said he mostly agreed with police, although he displayed his own figures and said the cameras didn't impact driver decisions.

Increased yellow-light times, rather than driver behavior, contributed to a decrease in violations and "flagrant red-light runners" simply disregard the cameras, Aames said.

"To me, the red-light cameras are kind of like a fool's gold," Aames said. "They sound like something that would really have an effect on accidents, on driver behavior, on safety, but they don't."

Councilwoman Joan Evans said she hoped police would consider lengthening the timing of yellow lights at other intersections.

And she requested they continue to monitor the four intersections that currently have red-light cameras, 83rd Avenue and Union Hills Drive, 91st Avenue and Bell Road, 83rd Avenue and Thunderbird Road, and 75th Avenue and Thunderbird Road.

Photos will no longer be taken as of next month, but it's not immediately clear when Peoria's red-light cameras will come down.

Redflex spokesman Tom Herrmann said Peoria's rise in crashes at intersections with red-light cameras didn't match other cities' experiences.

He cited a February report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, funded by auto insurance companies, which estimated red-light cameras helped usher in a combined 35 percent drop in fatal crashes over five years in more than a dozen U.S. cities.

"The experience in Peoria is a mystery because it's contrary to our experiences elsewhere," Herrmann said. "I don't doubt their statistics. I just wish we had a clear explanation for why that happened. Hopefully, we can re-establish the relationship with the city."