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Red-Light Cameras Lower Traffic Deaths, Agency Claims

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In a study released on Tuesday, the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#), found that red-light cameras could save lives.

The findings by the institute, a nonprofit group funded by the insurance industry, found that from 2004-8 the cameras saved 159 lives in 14 of the biggest American cities. Extrapolating from these findings, researchers claimed that had red-light cameras, which capture digital photographs of vehicles that supposedly run a red light, been operating during that same five-year period in all large American cities, 815 lives would have been saved.

Crashes that result from running a light are defined by the institute as T-bone crashes, in which a vehicle running a light crashes into the side of another vehicle — the type of crash in which occupants in the impacted car are particularly vulnerable because there is comparatively little material to absorb the impact.

According to government data, there were 676 deaths caused by red-light running in 2009, representing a decrease from 2001, when 1,009 deaths were reported.

Of 99 American cities with more than 200,000 residents in 2008, the researchers identified 14 that had installed traffic cameras from 2004-8. These cities became the primary study group, requiring two date ranges — one spanning a period during which no cameras were installed (1992-96) and another comprising the years during which they were installed (2004-8) — for researchers to effectively measure the rate of change.

The comparison group, meanwhile, included 48 cities that never installed cameras. For consistency, researchers split these cities' fatality data into the 1992-96 and 2004-8 date ranges.

In the 14 cities where cameras were installed, the combined per capita rate of fatal red-light crashes fell a combined 35 percent, relative to those cities' 1992-6 data. The fatality rate also fell in the 48 cities in which no cameras were ever installed, but by 14 percent.

The institute's findings still might not mollify the cameras' critics. Some opponents claim the devices violate personal privacy, while other dismiss them as mere revenue generators for cities. Critics also say the cameras simply trade one kind of crash for another; though side-impact crashes may decrease at intersections equipped with red-light cameras, rear-end crashes might increase.

The insurance institute acknowledges the assertion, but says that T-bone crashes are far more dangerous than rear-end crashes.

For more information, visit the institute's [Web site](#).

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