

POLICE PAGE



You're driving down a major road, listening to your radio without a care in the world when all of a sudden you see a flash. Initially, you manage to convince yourself that it was the guy in the car next to you that actually got nabbed, but when the ticket comes in the mail a few weeks later, you have to suck it up and face the consequences. The crystal clear picture seems like undeniable proof that you were guilty of speeding.

If you have not gone through this experience yourself, chances are you know someone who has. Photo enforcement has become more and more common throughout Arizona, and it is saving lives.

We spoke with Lieutenant Ron Warner of the Paradise Valley Police Department, the first department in the United States to use photo enforcement (for speeding) in October 1987.

In the mid-1980's northeast Phoenix and north Scottsdale experienced dramatic population growth. With no freeways and only three surface roads leading from the northeast valley to downtown Phoenix, the rise in traffic resulted in a great increase in traffic accidents. With three officers on patrol in Paradise Valley at any given time, this placed a tremendous drain on available resources and they needed to find a viable way to address this problem. At this time a private company demonstrated

their system of traffic control utilizing photo enforcement; PVPD tried it and it worked. In August 1996 the Department added red light cameras to its photo enforcement program.

Overall since 1987, the Department has had a reduction in collisions of nearly 50%



and a similar reduction in injuries. This is phenomenal when you consider the fact that the population and traffic have continued to increase.

The laws under which photo enforcement is conducted are the same throughout Arizona. Violations are civil in nature and the processing and service meet all legal requirements.

Don't think that just because your citation arrived in your mailbox without the uneasy conversation of a road stop, that it is any less imposing or important. Photo enforcement citations received in

the mail are identical to those issued by officers. The fines are the same and points are charged to your license.

Does the idea of automated judgment give you pause? We asked whether there is any leeway granted by the photo enforcement systems; is there no room for

subjectivity? Lt. Warner points out that there is a threshold at which photographs are taken, safely above the posted speed limit. No one receives a citation for going one or two miles over the limit. However, there is no threshold for red light violations; if the light is red when you enter the intersection, your deed is done and a citation is issued.

The bottom line on photo enforcement is simple: speed enforcement and red light enforcement save lives, prevent injuries, and help both the driver and the community avoid property damage. ■

