



Tacoma, WA - Wednesday, January 9, 2008

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Puyallup joins the camera company

System will target red-light runners

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Last updated: January 9th, 2008 01:22 AM (PST)

Add Puyallup to the list of cities placing camera cops at busy red lights.

It's installing cameras at three intersections this month to catch red-light runners, nearly a year after the City Council approved a traffic safety camera program last January.

Eight cameras are going up and will be turned on Feb. 1. But police won't start issuing \$124 tickets to scofflaws until after the first month of the program.

Violators will receive warnings until March 1, allowing drivers to get used to the cameras and giving the city time to work out kinks in the system, said Gary McLean, interim city manager.

The city hopes to install cameras at three more intersections by year's end, McLean said.

To run the cameras, the city has entered into a contract with American Traffic Solutions Inc. of Scottsdale, Ariz. McLean said he didn't have the cost of the contract available Tuesday, but that in most cities traffic ticket revenues more than offset any costs to the city. The company is paying for camera installation.

American Traffic Solutions will screen and send photos of violators' license plates to Puyallup police, who will evaluate whether there was a violation and then issue tickets.

Citations will be sent to vehicle owners in the mail and, like parking citations, won't appear on a person's driving record.

Puyallup is hardly the first Pierce County city turning to camera cops. Tacoma, Lakewood and Auburn have implemented traffic camera programs, and Federal Way and Fife are planning to install them soon.

Signs at the monitored intersections in Puyallup will tell drivers that photo enforcement is in effect.

Sgt. Bob Thompson said he's heard complaints about traffic signal runners for years and hopes the cameras will remind people the meaning of red.

"Right now, people basically don't care," Thompson said. "What this is trying to do is change people's behavior so they slow down and stop in front of red lights instead of trying to beat them."

The city reviewed traffic collision and injury reports to choose which intersections would have cameras.

Resident complaints about red light runners were also factored in, Thompson said.

Residents interviewed Tuesday varied in their support for the new program.

Gaye Nell Shanks, 64, of South Hill, said she doesn't mind the extra surveillance if it prevents accidents. She walks her dog near 31st Avenue Southeast and South Meridian, one of the intersections that will be monitored.

"I don't like the Big Brother idea any more than anyone else," Shanks said. "But people have no respect for the law, and it could be my life or my granddaughter's life on the line."

But Puyallup resident Jay Pettit, 25, said he doesn't think a camera can capture whether a person is driving safely.

"A lot of the time, it's a real judgment call," Pettit said. "There are a lot of big trucks and SUVs out here in Puyallup. If you slam on your brakes in one of those and it's raining, you could spin out and create another accident, or if there's someone right behind you you're going to get hit in the back."

McLean said the city might consider installing more cameras next year, but will limit itself in 2008 to test the effectiveness of the program.

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Originally published: January 9th, 2008 01:22 AM (PST)

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