



MEDIA INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WATERLOO PARTICIPATES IN “BLUE LIGHT” TRAFFIC STUDY TO MAKE INTERSECTIONS SAFER

WATERLOO, IOWA (August 29, 2013) – Red light running at intersections with traffic signals continues to be a serious safety concern for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists. Waterloo will soon be one of only two cities in Iowa experimenting with a new solution to this problem.

In 2011, the Federal Highway Administration reported that 676 fatalities – 10 percent of all signalized intersection crashes in the U.S. – were due to red light running.

Now, the City of Waterloo Traffic Operations Department has partnered with researchers at the University of Kansas School of Engineering on a study to increase safety at signalized intersections.

Starting Friday, the Ansborough Avenue and University Avenue intersection in Waterloo will utilize what's called a red light confirmation system. This intersection was selected based on recommendations from Traffic Operations and the University of Kansas research team.

“This initiative will surely assist the Waterloo Police Department with their goal to make the city safer,” said Chief Daniel Trelka, director of safety services for Waterloo.

The system is a low-cost, non-invasive measure designed to reduce the number of officers needed to monitor an intersection and to reduce the need to interrupt traffic to pursue a violating vehicle.

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Each traffic signal arm will have one or two blue lights – one adjacent to the left turn signal, the other next to the through signal. While the traffic signal is green, the blue light remains off. It comes on the moment the signal turns red. The blue light is visible from every angle, so officers and witnesses will know when a motorist has run a red light even if they cannot see the signal change colors.

Steve Walker, a Waterloo driver whose car was hit by a driver who ran a red light, looks forward to the changes that may come from the study.

“I was fortunate that I had a witness to the accident. The witness noticed I was the one who had the green light, so it was obvious that the other driver had a red light,” he said. “It sounds like this blue light system will make it clearer for everyone at the intersection to see what’s going on when there aren’t officers or witnesses paying attention.”

Researchers will evaluate the system over the next six months and report results to city and state officials. The system has shown promising results in Florida, Kentucky, Texas and Minnesota, and the City of Waterloo Traffic Operations Department expects the same.

“We are eager to participate in this study,” said Mohammad Elahi, a Waterloo traffic engineer. “Traffic safety is obviously a top priority for us, and we always welcome new tools that could help reduce accidents.”

The City of Altoona is currently the only other city in Iowa approved to participate in the study, where the intersection of 8th Street Southwest and 34th Avenue Southwest will be monitored.

The research project is funded by the Iowa Department of Transportation through the Iowa Highway Research Board, and is under the direction of Steven Schrock and Eric Fitzsimmons of the University of Kansas.

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“The School of Engineering is excited to partner with the cities of Altoona and Waterloo in an effort to improve driver safety at these busy intersections,” said Schrock, associate professor of civil, environmental and architectural engineering. “We believe this system can be a valuable tool for law enforcement, while substantially reducing the instances of red light running and making the roads safer for everyone.”

For further traffic safety information and tips, visit www.DriveSafeCV.org.

About Drive Safe Cedar Valley

Drive Safe Cedar Valley, a 501(c)(25) in Waterloo, is a nonprofit that promotes traffic safety awareness. As the first public awareness program of its kind in Iowa, the goal of Drive Safe Cedar Valley is to change the culture of driving. All citizens – drivers, passengers, bikers and pedestrians – are encouraged to become accountable for safety.

This lifesaving program was initially funded by an Iowa Department of Transportation traffic safety grant. Now in its seventh year, Drive Safe Cedar Valley depends on gifts and in-kind contributions to keep it going and growing.

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VISUAL: A photo of the blue lights that will be installed at the intersection of Ansborough Avenue and University Avenue in Waterloo beginning August 30.

Please note: For other visuals, or to receive the image in another format, please contact Mohammad Elahi at 319-291-4440 or mohammad.elahi@waterloo-ia.org.