**Module Attachments**

**Author's Print Story**

***Center City Accidents: A Friday Phenomenon***

One of the most dangerous times to drive in downtown Center City is mid-afternoon on a Friday, according to a *Center City Times* analysis. And the intersection where accidents are most likely to happen is Belvidere and Leigh Streets.

The Center City police department's annual list of the city's 10 most accident-prone intersections shows that most crashes happen at those crossings between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. on Fridays. Experts blame the double whammy of too many cars and too many drivers in a hurry.

"You typically have a higher volume of traffic on Friday," said Mike Sorensen, a crash reconstruction and training specialist at the Transportation Safety Institute. "Plus, on Friday, you want to get home a little bit quicker than you do on a Wednesday." He noted that local schools let out for the day between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m., putting more cars and buses on the road at that time.

In 2013, police reported 39 accidents at Belvidere and Leigh, 26 at Belvidere and Broad, and 20 at Broad and Hamilton Streets. It's the second year in a row for Belvidere and Leigh to top the list of the worst intersections.

Drivers filling up at the BP station on the corner of Belvidere and Broad said people often rush to get through the intersection. "I've seen a lot of people run the lights," said Paul Gregory, who was helping a friend vacuum his Jeep.

In fact, the police data show that the most common driver violation at the 10 worst intersections is a "disregard for the traffic signal." In about a quarter of the 198 crashes recorded in 2013, the investigating officer found drivers had ignored the signal. Forty-seven drivers involved in the accidents were cited for "following too close" and 37 for not having the right of way.

Property damage was highest in accidents where drivers disregarded traffic lights. The average amount of damage per accident was almost $7,000 when a driver ignored the signal, by far the most expensive kind of crash. The next most expensive crash was when a driver did not have the right of way, resulting in an average of just over $5,000 worth of damage per accident.

Sorensen said disregarding a traffic signal usually means "running a red light." But he said drivers who automatically go on green can also cause problems.

"Let's say you're the first car in line at the intersection and the light turns green--you take off and the other guy blows the stoplight and runs a red light," Sorensen said. “You're playing a part in the accident too by getting into the intersection too early."

This year's General Assembly passed a law giving localities the option of installing red-light cameras at intersections to catch motorists who run stoplights.

Red-light camera systems use triggers under the road and cameras at the corners of intersections that photograph cars driving through. Both the cameras and the triggers are connected to a computer, which monitors the traffic signal. If a car sets off a trigger when the light is red, the computer causes the camera to snap a picture, documenting the driver's action. Police believe that red-light cameras can be a deterrent: if drivers know they might be caught in the act, the thinking goes, they'll be less likely to run the light.

Police Chief Rodney Monroe says Center City is considering installing the systems, which cost between $67,000 and $80,000 per intersection, according to a U.S. Department of Transportation study from 2002.

"We do have a big problem in Center City with people blatantly running red lights," said Monroe, whose department issued 1,559 red-light violations in 2013.

"I wholeheartedly support the technology," Monroe said. "Anytime we can use technology to assist with enforcement activities, we free up officers to be in other critical locations."

But Monroe said the cameras won't be installed any time soon. The City Council has not yet approved them and there are no funds available to pay for them.

Plus, the technology is far from a perfect solution. A Virginia Department of Transportation study released in 2007 found that red-light cameras don't work everywhere. The study's researchers recommended that each locality make a decision about using the cameras at particular intersections on a case-by-case basis.

Highlights from the VDOT study show that when red-light cameras are in operation at an intersection:

* Rear-end crashes increase, but crashes from running red lights decrease.
* The impact of the cameras on the severity of injuries for those involved in the crashes can't be fully determined.
* Results vary widely by intersection.

Traffic safety experts say at least 80% of accidents are caused by human factors, including the use of drugs and alcohol. But the number one cause of crashes is simply driver distraction, said Robert Breitenbach of the Transportation Safety Institute, and according to his studies the primary distraction is "rubbernecking."

His advice would sound familiar to anyone who's been through a driver education class--stay at least two seconds behind the car in front of you and keep your eyes on the road. "Whenever you take your eyes off the road," Breitenbach said, "you expose yourself to risk."

***Center City police reported the 10 intersections with the most accidents in 2013:***

Belvidere Street and Leigh Street..... 39

Belvidere Street and Broad Street..... 26

Broad Street and Harrison Street..... 20

Hamilton Avenue and Broad Street..... 18

Jefferson Davis Highway and Maury Street..... 18

Allen Avenue and Broad Street..... 16

Chippenham Parkway and Forest Hill Avenue..... 16

Hey Road and Hull Avenue..... 16

Hermitage Road and Laburnum Avenue..... 15

2nd Street and Franklin Street..... 14

***Accidents at the 10 worst intersections by day of week in 2013.***

* Sunday..... 22
* Monday..... 28
* Tuesday..... 34
* Wednesday..... 27
* Thursday..... 24
* Friday..... 37
* Saturday..... 26

***Accidents at 10 worst intersections by time of day in 2013.***

* Midnight–1 a.m...... 3
* 1–2 a.m...... 8
* 2–3 a.m...... 3
* 3–4 a.m...... 1
* 4–5 a.m...... 2
* 5–6 a.m...... 2
* 6–7 a.m...... 1
* 7–8 a.m...... 3
* 8–9 a.m...... 13
* 9–10 a.m...... 14
* 10–11 a.m...... 15
* 11–noon..... 12
* 12–1 p.m...... 9
* 1–2 p.m...... 11
* 2–3 p.m...... 13
* 3–4 p.m...... 19
* 4–5 p.m...... 15
* 5–6 p.m...... 9
* 6–7 p.m...... 13
* 7–8 p.m...... 7
* 8–9 p.m...... 4
* 9–10 p.m...... 12
* 10–11 p.m...... 5
* 11–midnight..... 5