Town of Star Valley Photo Enforcement Program Frequently Asked Questions

When and why did Star Valley implement its photo enforcement program?

Star Valley began taking pictures of violators on January 31, 2008. Warning letters were mailed to the registered owners of violating vehicles from January 31 thru February 29, 2008. Actual enforcement began March 1, 2008. Traffic safety is and always has been the reason for implementing the system. There is a history of speeding and traffic accidents on the stretch of SR 260 that runs through the Town of Star Valley.

Is Star Valley's system a "Photo Radar" system?

No, there is no radar involved in the system. In Star Valley's system, sensors are embedded in the pavement of each lane, so the computer knows the lane location of any speeding vehicle detected. Unfortunately, people often use the term "Photo Radar" to refer to all traffic camera systems, but the correct terminology is "Photo Enforcement," not "Photo Radar."

How, and how often, is a fixed speed detection system calibrated and checked for accuracy?

Detection system accuracy is established at the time of installation by comparing the speed indicated by the system with a calibrated detection device. The system is configured to an accuracy of +/- 1 MPH of the calibrated detection device reading. The term "calibration" is often used inappropriately in this situation. There are no adjustments made once the initial setup is accomplished, and the only way to change the way the system detects vehicle speed is by changing one of the two constants involved (#1 the distance between the two sensors, and/or #2 the way time is measured by the computer).

A variety of devices are used to verify accuracy and include but are not limited to:

- Vehicle speed test and verification
- Radar detection systems
- Certified speedometers
- Laser speed detection systems

The Town's vendor conducts verification of system accuracy routinely for each speed certified location to ensure proper equipment operation. The routine inspections referenced are also conducted when maintenance repairs are performed. In order to put a repaired system back in operation a systems check is performed, and if the indications of improper speed exist, a speed verification check is performed as part of that inspection. These indications include but are not limited to:

- Visible damage to the sensors
- Excessive detection "abortions" due to failed speed tolerance checks

The system performs a speed tolerance test for each detection and ensures the speeds entering and exiting the detection zone are consistent or the detection aborts the processing of the detection as a violation.

Speed verification checks are performed as a result of the following activities:

- Initial installation and commissioning
- Sensor replacement
- Sensor cabling or connector replacement
- Detection system replacement
- During routine inspections for proper system operation

How is speed determined at fixed detection system locations?

Two piezo strips are used to time a vehicle's location at two specific fixed points. Based on the time it takes a vehicle to travel from point A to point B, a speed calculation is made. A loop is placed between the two piezos to verify activation by a vehicle (inductive loop detects the presence of metal) rather than another source.

Basically:

1. There are two piezo strips "cut" into the road at a fixed distance apart (approximately 6 ft)
2. Timing is started when the vehicle strikes the first piezo sensor which is verified by the rise of the loop
3. Timing stops when the same "axle" strikes the second piezo
4. Each "axle" is counted and measured for speed until the fall of the loop which signifies the end of the vehicle
5. Each independent speed measurement (all subsequent axles relative to the first) are compared to the first axle speed
6. The detection is valid if all speeds are accurate within preset tolerance limits

Once the initial conditions have been met (steps 1 -3) the camera is activated, when all conditions have been met the system verification is completed and the detection packaging sequence commences firing the cameras based on the vehicle's speed.

At what speed are photos taken?

Photos of speeding vehicles are taken at 11 mph or more over the posted speed limit. The margin is intended to address language in the Arizona Revised Statutes related to speed offenses that defines

"...reasonable and prudent..." speed. It also provides a reasonable margin of error/grace for inaccurate vehicle speedometers and short-term lapses of attention by otherwise law-abiding and generally cautious drivers.

Our primary focus is on intentional, aggressive and negligent drivers. Statistics tell us that at 10 mph over the posted speed limit, the probability of being involved in a crash doubles. However, at 20 mph over, the probability increases to 11 times greater. We are trying to change the driving behavior of those persons who are most likely to cause crashes. Citing at 11 mph or more over the speed limit is the standard for most jurisdictions, nation-wide, that employ photo enforcement systems.

Is the driver or the vehicle's registered owner responsible for detected speeding violations?

Arizona is a driver-responsibility state, so citations are issued to the driver. Nation-wide, most states which allow photo enforcement systems are owner-responsibility states, but Arizona, along with California, Colorado, and Oregon, is a driver-responsibility state.

Are points assessed against my driver's license for photo enforcement convictions?

Yes. In accordance with Arizona Administrative Code R17-4-404, Driver Point System, points are assessed by Arizona MVD for each conviction reported to them by the Court. For out-of-state drivers, convictions are shared with other states in the interstate compact; points would also be assessed in that state's records according to the policies in effect there.

Can I avoid points being assessed against my driver's license for photo enforcement convictions by attending a defensive driving class?

Yes. If you have not used the Defensive Driving Class (DDC) option in the most recent two years, you can avoid points being assessed against your license. This alternative is fully explained on the options page of each photo enforcement citation. New to Arizona is the ability to complete DDC on-line, that is, by means of a computer with internet access. Please visit the following website: www.azcourts.gov/driveschoolinfo or please call 1-888-334-5565.