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Traffic Safety

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ISSUE: Fines for running red lights increase.

Auto accidents caused by careless drivers who disregard red traffic lights ruin too many lives every year. State lawmakers were right to double the fines for the offense, an action that sets red-light running as a high priority for roadway law enforcement.

Now police agencies across Florida must follow up by handing out tickets to violators. The fines, after all, won't do much good unless careless drivers are forced to pay.

So far, too many others have paid a high price for lawlessness at intersections. Too many motorists are killed, and too many others are injured in collisions caused by irresponsible drivers who decide they are in such a great hurry that they need not obey traffic signals.

Don't think it's that much of a problem? It's estimated that traffic signal-related accidents account for more than half of the motorists that each year end up in Florida trauma care centers.

The steady stream of critically injured motorists from violent intersection crashes has also put a great strain on the state's trauma centers. That's why lawmakers have directed that the additional money raised from the fines, approximately \$30 million per year, will be disbursed to the trauma units.

There's much that still can be done to reduce the carnage on the streets. Local traffic engineers could help by synchronizing street lights so frustrated drivers don't feel the need to speed through intersections to beat ill-timed light changes.

Ultimately, though, the solution lies in the hands of hasty drivers across the state. They must understand that their recklessness costs lives, and isn't worth the minutes saved by avoiding one more light change.

If it takes another \$65 per ticket to teach that lesson, then it's money well charged.

BOTTOM LINE: Drivers must stop for red lights before it costs them more money, if not their lives.

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