



*John C. Lincoln Hospital is asking for your help in making drivers aware that running stoplights can be fatal in the Valley.*

# Putting a Stop to Red Light Running

Trauma surgeon **Marc A. Levison, M.D.**, has seen it all when it comes to the human toll of trauma-from injuries caused by boat and motorcycle crashes to falls and gunshot wounds. But by far, one of the most serious traumas he continues to see is from automobile crashes due to red light running. "As a single group, they are the most severely injured patients," says Dr. Levison.

Unfortunately, Dr. Levison and his colleagues at John C. Lincoln Hospital's—North Mountain Level 1 Trauma Center are seeing a steady stream of such patients due to drivers who choose to run a red light. These patients are often occupants of cars that have been smashed from the side, or T-boned, which directly—and immediately—can result in life-threatening injuries. A recent report by the Insurance Institute

for Highway Safety showed that between 1992 and 1998, almost 6,000 people died due to red light running, an 18 percent increase during that time. And leading the way was Arizona, with 7.1 deaths per 100,000 residents. Phoenix, where red light runners kill 20 to 25 people each year and injure another 4,500, ranked highest among the cities. Mesa was number two, Tucson number four.

Why these Arizona cities and the state have this distressing distinction is not clear, says Dr. Levison, but the reasons for red light running—aggressive, inattentive or rushed driving—are. Those are not really reasons but causes, Dr. Levison says impatiently, that can be avoided.

"These are not accidents because they could have been prevented," says Dr. Levison. "That's why we're doing whatever we can do to reduce the incidence."

Dr. Levison is referring to public awareness efforts by an alliance of citizens and civic organizations in the Valley, including staff and volunteers from the John C. Lincoln Hospitals. Employing a Mothers Against Drunk Driving approach to red light running, the concerned groups are using educational materials like window decals and direct mailings to drive the message home that red light running, although avoidable, is common and kills. For example, materials distributed by the John C. Lincoln organization note that in the Valley, a motorist runs a red light every 12 minutes—every 5 during rush hour, adding that red light running is the most preventable driving hazard. Lincoln is also offering the public a car decal that says, "I Stop on Red."

This special decal—when displayed on your car—will alert other drivers of your intentions to obey traf-

fic laws and stop at all stop signs and red lights.

"If together we can educate the public about the scope of the problem, and the consequences of red light running, maybe we can get people to change their behavior and cut down the number of injuries and deaths," says Adrienne Gallant, R.N., pre-hospital coordinator of John C. Lincoln Hospital—North Mountain, who spends a lot of time riding with paramedics.

"Is rushing anywhere worth the risk of taking someone's life or seriously injuring her?" asks Linda Llewellyn, who was on her way to her job as director of volunteer services at John C. Lincoln Hospital—Deer Valley on November 28, 1998, when a Honda Civic driven by a 17-year-old anxious to get home hit Linda's Chevy S10 pickup, flipping it 360 degrees in the air.

John C. Lincoln's effort was spurred by former trauma nurse Trudy Thompson Rice, a John C. Lincoln Health Foundation Guild Member who was very much aware of the killing and maiming resulting from intersection crashes. Lincoln is a member of a local advocacy organization called the Red Means Stop Coalition. Founded by several Arizona fathers who had children involved in red light running crashes, the group's goals are:

- to increase public awareness of the dangers and tragic consequences of intersection crashes
- to support legislation, enforcement and prosecution that imposes stiffer penalties on violators
- to establish a center and volunteer program to help victims and their families survive the painful circumstances that follow these tragedies

"The more that we can get the message out that this is a serious problem," says Dr. Levison, "then fewer people will have to die unnecessarily."

Show your support for this important issue and get your free "I Stop on Red" sticker by calling the John C. Lincoln fulfillment line at **602-787-3399**. To learn more, please visit our website at **www.JCL.com** ■