

Why Crashes at Pittsburgh Red Lights and Stop Signs Are So Dangerous

Get trusted legal help after a Pittsburgh intersection crash

Intersections are where roads meet and people driving, walking and biking cross paths. That convergence creates multiple points of conflict. The Federal Highway Administration states that about [one-quarter of all traffic deaths](#) and half of all traffic injuries in the United States happen at intersections. Roughly one-third of intersection fatalities occur at signalized intersections, and unsignalized intersections (many controlled by stop signs) are the most common.

Pittsburgh's road layout makes intersection safety even more challenging. Many streets were designed long before modern traffic volumes. The city's famous hills and narrow corridors limit sight lines; a driver cresting a hill or rounding a bend may not see another vehicle until the last second. In winter, ice and snow reduce traction and obscure stop signs and signals. At night, some older intersections lack adequate lighting.

Here are some of Pittsburgh's most dangerous intersections, based on crash data and local studies:

- West End Bridge at West Carson Street
- P.J. McArdle Roadway at the Liberty Bridge
- Saw Mill Run Boulevard & Colerain Street
- Liberty Avenue through Bloomfield / Strip District
- Route 51 at Whited Street

Why are Pittsburgh red-light and stop-sign crashes especially severe?

Several factors make collisions at traffic lights and stop signs more dangerous than you might expect. For example:

T-bone crashes deliver direct force

The most destructive intersection crashes occur when one vehicle hits the side of another, known as a [T-bone accident](#). Side impacts injure the head and chest more severely than front or rear impacts. When a driver runs a red light, the cross traffic often has little time to react. The striking vehicle plows into the door of the other car, right where the occupants are sitting.

Speed differences increase the impact

Drivers approaching a green light may be accelerating, while others may be [speeding](#) to "beat the light." At stop signs, some drivers treat a stop as a slow roll, misjudging the speed of cross traffic. Because the vehicles enter the intersection from perpendicular directions, their combined speed determines the force of the crash. Even at 30–40 mph, the energy is immense.

Multiple vehicles get involved

Intersections funnel cars from several directions. One red-light violation can trigger a chain reaction. The first collision pushes a vehicle into another lane, causing secondary impacts. Rear-end collisions are common when a driver brakes suddenly at a yellow light and the following car fails to notice. These pileups increase the number of injuries and complicate insurance claims.

Pedestrians and cyclists are exposed

Crosswalks and bike lanes converge at intersections. A vehicle that runs a red light doesn't just endanger other drivers; it endangers [pedestrians](#) as well as [bicyclists](#). In neighborhoods, children often cross at stop signs on their way to school or a park. A driver who rolls through without stopping can cause tragedies.

Driver behavior is often reckless

Running a red light is usually an intentional choice born of impatience or distraction. Many drivers accelerate when the light turns yellow instead of slowing down, turning the intersection into a gamble.

Smartphones have made distracted driving rampant; looking down at a text for two seconds can cause a driver to miss a changing traffic signal. Alcohol and drugs impair judgment and reaction time, increasing the chance of a bad decision at an intersection.

How does Pittsburgh's red-light enforcement effort work?

In response to these dangers, Pittsburgh launched the [Automated Red Light Enforcement](#) (ARLE) program. According to the city's ARLE materials, red-light cameras operate in 337 U.S. cities and can reduce fatal red-light running crash rates by 21%.

Red-light cameras work by detecting when a car enters an intersection after the light has turned red, which captures photos and video of the violation, and sends a citation by mail. The goal is deterrence: if drivers know they're being watched, they're less likely to risk running a light.

What are the risks of stop-sign intersections?

Stop-sign-controlled intersections may seem safer than busy signalized crossings, but they have their own hazards, including:

- **Rolling stops:** Drivers often slow down instead of stopping completely, then pull into the intersection without checking properly. On Pittsburgh's steep hills, rolling through a stop sign can send a car directly into cross traffic traveling at full speed.

- **Right-of-way confusion:** At four-way stops, drivers sometimes forget that the first to arrive has the right to go first. Miscommunication leads to collisions.
- **Low visibility:** In some neighborhoods, stop signs are obscured by trees or parked cars. Drivers may not see approaching vehicles until they're already in the intersection.
- **Proximity to homes and schools:** Stop signs are common near residential areas where children play and walk. A rolling stop is particularly dangerous when pedestrians or cyclists are nearby.

What types of injuries occur in intersection accidents?

Because the mechanisms of crashes at red lights and stop signs are similar to other intersection collisions, the injuries overlap. These might include:

- **Head, neck and chest injuries:** T-bone crashes cause concussions, skull fractures, TBIs, broken ribs and lung injuries. Research shows that side impacts are more like to result in head and chest injuries than other crash types.
- **Whiplash and spinal injuries:** Even rear-end collisions at a red light can cause whiplash. Whiplash is a range of neck injuries resulting from sudden movement and is among the most common claims. Severe impacts can damage discs or the spinal cord.
- **Lower-body injuries:** Pelvic and femur fractures occur when legs are crushed or pinned. Knees and ankles may be twisted or broken.

What makes intersection accidents in Pittsburgh so challenging?

Pennsylvania's comparative negligence rule creates unique challenges for people hurt in intersection crashes. Under this system, the compensation you receive depends on your percentage of fault.

If you're found to be 20% responsible for the crash, your total award is reduced by 20%. If you're 51% or more at fault, you can't recover anything at all. That means the other driver's insurance company has every incentive to argue that you share a bigger slice of the blame than you actually do.

This often plays out in subtle but frustrating ways. For example, the other driver's insurance company may claim you were speeding, distracted, or failed to yield, even if the other driver clearly ran the red light. They might also lean on incomplete or conflicting witness statements to muddy the waters about who had the right of way.

These tactics can leave you feeling pressured to accept less than what you deserve. Successfully overcoming them requires gathering strong evidence. You must present a clear picture of how the collision unfolded and push back against efforts to inflate your share of fault.

How is fault proven in intersection accidents?

Assigning responsibility after an intersection crash often boils down to who violated the traffic control. To establish fault in an intersection accident, you generally need to show four key elements, including:

- **Duty of care:** Every driver must obey traffic signals, signs, and basic safety rules.
- **Breach of duty:** You must prove the other driver failed in that duty, such as running a red light or driving distracted.
- **Causation:** It isn't enough to show a rule was broken; you need to connect their action directly to the crash.
- **Damages:** Finally, you must demonstrate real harm, whether that's medical bills, lost wages, or pain and suffering.

To prove these four key criteria, you'll need strong evidence. For example:

- Police reports show whether a driver was cited for running a red light, failing to stop or speeding.
- Witnesses can describe the color of the light or whether someone stopped.
- Traffic camera footage is powerful evidence. Pittsburgh's ARLE program collects such footage; it can show the exact moment a vehicle entered on red.
- Signal timing records reveal how long the yellow phase lasts and whether it met design standards.
- Event data recorders in newer vehicles record speed and braking.
- Physical evidence such as skid marks and vehicle damage helps reconstruction experts demonstrate how the crash happened.

Put experience on your side after an intersection accident

An intersection crash in Pittsburgh can change your life in seconds and leave you with painful injuries, medical bills, and a fight with the insurance company you never asked for. [Romanow Law Group](#) knows what it takes to cut through the confusion and hold negligent drivers accountable.

When you sit down with us for a free consultation, you'll get the information you need to decide what to do next. We'll listen carefully to your story, review the details of your car accident and medical care, and give you straightforward guidance on your options. You'll walk away knowing what steps to take and how we can help protect your rights. Since we work on a contingency fee basis, you won't pay any money upfront for our services.

We proudly serve clients across Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities, and if you can't come to us, we'll come to you. [Contact us](#) today to schedule your free consultation and put the Romanow Difference to work for you.