

Arizona aims to combat wrong-way driving with new technology

July 28 2017, by Angie Wang And Clarice Silber

Arizona transportation officials are moving forward with a first-in-the-nation pilot program that will use thermal camera technology to curb the wrong-way driving problem plaguing the state.

The detection system will illuminate a sign that notifies the wrong-way driver and immediately alert the state Department of Public Safety. Arizona Department of Transportation officials will update message boards along the interstate, cautioning other [drivers](#) of a wrong-way vehicle.

The program will be installed on a 15-mile (24-kilometer) stretch of Interstate 17 in Phoenix, along roadways and ramps.

Wrong-way drivers have killed at least eight deaths in Arizona this year.

In early June, metro Phoenix saw three wrong-way wrecks over the course of about two weeks. The two resulting fatalities prompted Gov. Doug Ducey to urge state agencies to accelerate and broaden the [thermal camera](#) detection program.

"I want those cameras implemented as quickly as possible, and expanded to as many areas as possible where they may make a difference and save a life," Ducey said.

Transportation spokesman Steve Elliott said officials have moved the project's timeline forward about a month by pre-ordering materials,

including cameras, poles and fiber-optic cables.

In June, Sen. Karen Fann, vice-chairman of the state Senate Transportation Committee, said wrong-way wrecks have always been a problem, but increasingly so in recent years.

"I haven't seen as many in my entire life as I've seen in the past five years," said Fann, who owns a highway construction company.

The Arizona State Transportation Board unanimously voted Friday to award the contract to Contractors West, Inc., a Mesa-based company that specializes in highway electrical and sign work.

State officials expect the cameras will be installed between the Interstate 10 and Loop 101 interchanges on I-17 by the end of November.

Elliott said it's important that the project adheres to the timeline, which slates [camera](#) installation for early August. If Contractors West does not sign the contract by Monday, the board will offer the project to the next lowest bidder.

Contractors West's bid was about \$1.9 million, 6.6 percent higher than the state's estimate but within the project's \$3.7 million budget. State officials used some of the funding to purchase equipment in hopes of expediting the project.

Department of Public Safety officials said there have been 956 reported incidents involving wrong-way drivers so far in 2017. More than 80 percent of the drivers are impaired, they said. Most reported incidents don't result in arrests or collisions because motorists correct themselves, said Alberto Gutier, director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety.

Transportation officials installed lower and larger "wrong way" and "do not enter" signs on freeway ramps in 2015, in an effort to curb the problem. Dallas Hammit, a state engineer and deputy director for transportation, said the program will also help identify the ramps where wrong-way drivers are more prone to enter the freeway.

The new system will allow law enforcement to respond to wrong-way driving cases even faster than it already does, Elliott said.

"It really boils down to notification and early word," Elliott said.

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Arizona aims to combat wrong-way driving with new technology (2017, July 28)
retrieved 9 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2017-07-arizona-aims-combat-wrong-way-technology.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
