

Research mightier than pickax

If there is a threat to the speed-enforcement cameras on Arizona's highways, it won't come from a crazed motorist with a pickax, but from a well-spoken zealot armed with research.

Someone like Greg Mauz, who called me last week from his home in Texas.

Mauz isn't a classically trained engineer, but a one-time trucker who has devoted decades to studying what is known to bureaucrats and politicians as "automated traffic enforcement."

He has produced several studies for the National Motorists Association (available at www.motorists.org/mauz.php), and he has come to some damning conclusions.

He outlined them for me at the beginning of our conversation.

"It is a well-established fact that most speed limits are underposted," he said.



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"The only way that a camera can make money through speed enforcement and red-light enforcement is to have what I call engineering malpractice," he said.

"That is, to set the standard so low that it increases violations. Not only that, but there is plenty of data — including a big study done in England — that speed cameras actually cause more crashes than they prevent."

Mauz understands that, to most of us, common sense would suggest just the opposite.

"I'm not the only one who

says these things," he told me.

"The federal government's own studies have said, for instance, that the safest speed limit is one set at the 85th percentile, and the further down you go from that, the more dangerous that road becomes."

The 85th percentile represents the speed at or below which 85 percent of the free-flowing traffic is moving.

"There really is no such thing as a speeding problem on most roads," Mauz said.

"There is only a speed-limit problem.

"And it is created on purpose because speed enforcement has become a multibillion-dollar business that government on lots of levels wants to cash in on. Just as the state wants to do in Arizona."

Mauz says that when the statistics are broken down, very few accidents are caused exclusively by speed.

More often, he said, we're

talking about complicating factors like impaired drivers, who don't care about speed.

Or careless drivers, who may not be speeding but could be going too fast for weather conditions.

"If you factor out everything *but* speed, you end up with 2 or 3 percent of accidents," Mauz said. "Things like cameras are feel-good remedies that are sold to the public.

"I have no problem with posting more officers at places like red lights. Think about it. A camera will snap a picture of a drunk as he drives through. A cop will pull a guy over and maybe save someone's life. That's makes more sense to me."

Mauz said that he sent his research to Gov. Janet Napolitano's office before she implemented the new statewide speed-camera enforcement program. I asked him why any of us should listen to someone

like him when the government has its own experts and consultants.

"Because I'm not in this for the money," he said. "You can ask my wife about that. I didn't get paid for the studies I did for the NMA. Meantime, every time I look on the Internet, I see new cities setting up speed-camera and red-light-camera programs. And those are about money."

Likewise, the average citizen wouldn't have much luck trying to contact the politicians behind speed cameras or the experts they use, but when I asked Mauz if there was an address or e-mail account where people could write to him if they're interested in challenging his assertions or finding out more about his research, he told me:

"Heck, have them just call me. I'm happy to lay out the facts for anyone."

His number is 325-896-2595.