



# THE PLATE ESCAPE



**BEATING THE LIGHT:** PhotoBlocker coats a license plate with a clear gloss that reflects the flash from a traffic-light enforcement camera, making it impossible for authorities to read the number and mail a summons.

## Spray-on blurs traffic tix pix

By ANGELA MONTEFINISE

A clear spray that distorts a license plate image — and helps drivers beat tickets for running a red light — is selling like hotcakes, despite a law banning its use.

PhotoBlocker is being sold in eight New York-area stores and is getting "more popular every day," according to dealer John Ciampa.

"Usually, I sell at least eight to 10 cans a day," he said. "The seven stores sell two or three a day. Then there's the Internet and the phone."

When sprayed on a license plate, PhotoBlocker reflects the flash of a traffic-light camera, blurring the plate in a photo so it's unreadable. Without a clear picture, a fine can't be mailed to the driver.

Since manufacturer Phantom-Plate launched the product in 2001, roughly 500,000 cans have been sold worldwide.

"We're seeing sales really spike — especially in cities where there are more cameras like New York,"

said spokesman Joe Scott.

That's a "major problem," according to furious Bronx Assemblyman Peter Rivera, who introduced legislation — passed in August — banning the spray's use.

"This enables someone to run a red light and not get caught. It's that simple. It creates a safety hazard," he said.

It may also be a financial problem.

According to the mayor's office, 450,000 red-light summonses were issued in 2003, the most recent year available, Rivera said.

Approximately 31 percent of the fines — usually \$50 with a \$25 late fee — could not be mailed because the plate was unreadable. Although Rivera admits other factors could affect the images, he thinks the spray plays a role.

"I have no doubt that this spray is one cause," he said. "And do the math. It could be costing us upwards of \$1 million a year."

Customers claim PhotoBlocker

has also helped them beat E-ZPass tolls. Officials from the New York State Thruway Authority and New Jersey Turnpike Authority doubt it.

"If people think they can use a spray to beat the system, they're in for a rude awakening," said Turnpike Authority spokesman Joe Orlando.

Ciampa said the spray "definitely" works on E-ZPass, but said the company "absolutely does not encourage that use."

"This is not a product for breaking the law," Ciampa said. "It helps people beat unfair tickets."

Rivera claims his legislation is "not being enforced effectively." The state Department of Motor Vehicles hasn't issued any specific regulations because it believes one already on the books prohibiting the covering or coating of license plates includes the spray.

"We concluded that regulations are not necessary to implement the law," said DMV Executive Deputy Commissioner Renato Do-

nato Jr. in a Dec. 27 letter to Rivera.

New York State Police Sgt. Tom Ferritto said officers have not been enforcing the law because they're waiting for an "enforcement memo" from the DMV — a memo the DMV claims is not necessary.

"The confusion is ridiculous," Rivera said. "This is important."

The NYPD did receive a memo to watch for the spray, a spokeswoman said, but a "disappointed" Rivera believes the law is "basically toothless" unless the DMV issues more specific regulations.

"There's really no way to enforce it," said Ciampa, who sells the product at [smokescreenplate.com](http://smokescreenplate.com). "There's no way to really detect it. There's really nothing they can do."

Rivera keeps trying: He's introduced legislation to make selling the spray illegal. "Something needs to be done," he said. "This is just crazy that this can go on."

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