

Berkshire Eagle

Iris scan is quick way to ID kids

Law enforcement officials are working to include local data in a national program.

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PITTSFIELD — The Berkshire County Sheriff's Office is starting a campaign to photograph the eyes of every school-age child in the county for inclusion in a national database meant to help identify recovered children more quickly.

With "iris recognition biometric technology," law enforcement officials can access the database on laptop computers wirelessly via a secure Web site to identify a subject in 12 to 15 seconds, said Berkshire County Sheriff Carmen C. Massimiano Jr. At any location with access to a cell tower, the database will be wirelessly accessible.

He noted that it also will be used for the elderly.

"This is a wonderful tool for sheriffs and police throughout the commonwealth and the nation," Massimiano said. "We're going to every school that wants us to and take pictures of the children's irises for inclusion in the national database."

It also will be useful for the elderly who suffer from Alzheimer's disease or dementia. "And many elders don't even have photo IDs," Massimiano said.

The sheriff explained that no two irises are alike and that, after the age of 1, they remain the same throughout the aging process.

The technology would come into play when a missing person is recovered; a law enforcement officer would need to confirm the identification of the subject quickly.

Figures provided by the sheriff's office, collected in studies by the U.S. Justice Department, show that 2,000 children are reported missing daily nationwide. The figures also show that there are 47,000 active missing adult cases.

The technology was made available through a state grant of \$439,000 for all 14 counties in Massachusetts, which will pay for the hardware, software and training.

According to Sean Mullin, president of B12 Technologies, it will take about 18 months to record the irises of all the children in the county. He said the program is already in use in more than half the states, and there are already "well over 100,000" people in the database.

As a demonstration for the press, Massimiano had four students from Cheshire Elementary School on hand as the first subjects for the program.

Second-grader Madison Graves, 8, was one of the four. Her mother, Marsha Graves of Cheshire, said she fully supports the program.

"It's hard nowadays — you feel like you just can't protect your kids enough," she said. "Some people think it's another way for the federal government to control your personal life, but I think whatever we can do to keep our kids safe, we should do."

Mullins noted that, to access the database, the user must be using a fully certified device with full levels of clearance on a network connection that has been preauthorized.

Once the scan is in the database, it will remain there until the subject becomes 18. Even then, he or she can choose to remain in the database, Massimiano said. Parental permission must be given before the child's information is entered into the system, he said.