

Iris scans to aid Marion police work

Biometric system will aid in locating and recovering missing children

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Statesman Journal

November 30, 2005

The Marion County Sheriff's Office received a new tool Tuesday that officials hope will help identify lost children.

Like something out of a science-fiction movie, the camera, laptop and software use Iris Recognition Biometric Technology to photograph an eye's iris and store its unique markings in a database.

The department was one of four Oregon sheriff's offices -- the first agencies in the state -- to get the equipment. Oregon is the 18th state in which the technology is available. The sheriff's offices are among about 40 agencies that have it.

"The ultimate hope is that we rescue or find a missing child," Marion County Deputy Kevin Rau said.

Marion and Curry counties each received one system. Linn and Clackamas counties each received two.

Marion County plans to add the technology to its current programs for identifying children in case they go missing. With parents' permission, the office already fingerprints children and takes hair samples for DNA.

Beginning in January, the county will do iris scans of children at local schools, fairs and special events, Rau said.

The sheriff's office also will consider using the program for senior citizens.

"I really think it's going to make a difference in making positive identification of people," Marion County Undersheriff Greg Olson said.

The technology was brought to the counties through the Children's Identification and Location Database Project, also known as the CHILD Project.

CHILD Project, a private company, is working in conjunction with the Arizona-based nonprofit Nation's Missing Children Organization and the National Center for Missing Adults, which helped develop the program and will house the database.

Sean Mullin, one of the owners of CHILD Project, delivered the systems to the counties at a meeting Tuesday.

CHILD Project doesn't own the technology license but has licensed the underlying

Funding

The Clackamas and Marion county sheriff's offices received their grant funding for the Iris Recognition Biometric Technology from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Curry and Linn counties paid for their equipment with federal appropriations secured with the help of U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore.

In all, the four counties received \$156,000.

algorithm used in it. The company developed the software and database during the past 18 months. It began distributing the systems in July.

Mullin estimates that it will take three to five years to build a database of 3 million to 5 million children and senior citizens.

The national database currently has a few thousand scans in it.

Although a good tool, "it's not a silver bullet," Mullin said. "It's not going to stop all these horrible tragedies."

The iris is the most mathematically identifiable part on a human body, CHILD Project said.

The technology compares the unique features within each iris. It can tell the difference between twins' irises and a person's left and right eyes.

On Tuesday, during a demonstration at his Wilsonville office, Clackamas County Sheriff Craig Roberts put his face in front of the camera and it took a digital picture of the brown irises in his eyes.

Within seconds, it matched the image to one in a database and identified him.

"It's going to be, I think, the way to go in the future," Clackamas County Deputy Mark Koberstein said. "If it can help save kids, get them back to where they're safe more quickly, even better."

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