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## **TCSO gets state's first iris scanning equipment**

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TUSCALOOSA | No longer just a Hollywood creation, iris scanning technology is ready to be put to use by the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office.

On Thursday, the Sheriff's Office unveiled its \$25,000 eye scanning equipment that it says will serve as a more sophisticated method of documenting people's identities.

The Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office is the first in the state to have the equipment, said Sheriff Ted Sexton.

"With this innovative program and technology, the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office will not only be able to better protect the children in Tuscaloosa County, but in Alabama and the nation as well," Sexton said. "The [Sheriff's Office] will now be able to work with other law enforcement agencies across the nation to help with the growing problem of missing children and adults."

The equipment and information database that will store the eye scan profiles were purchased through the Nation's Missing Children Organization as part of a collaborative program between NMCO and law enforcement and social services agencies throughout the country.

The collaborative project is known as the Children's Identification and Location Database, or CHILD.

CHILD Project eye scan equipment was in about 30 sheriff's offices across the country at the end of 2005, said Robert E. Melley, the project's vice president and chief operating officer, and there are expectations to have it in another 75 to 100 sheriff's offices by the end of 2006.

The program works by taking a digital snapshot of both eyes and linking them with a series of identifiers (name, birthdate, and hair color, among others) that is then stored in a database managed by the Nation's Missing Children Organization, which is part of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The scan of the colored part of the eye is five times more reliable than a fingerprint, Melley said, and remains constant throughout a lifetime, starting at around the age of six months.

"It never changes," Melley said, "and each eye is different on every individual."

The intent is to eventually get a national database of iris scans, much like the one that currently stores fingerprints, to easily and quickly identify missing and other anonymous persons.

Statistics from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children show that, on average, 2,000 children are reported missing everyday.

Sexton said he would place eye scanning stations at the Tuscaloosa County Jail for use during the booking process "to ensure the true identification of all inmates prior to release," as well as the Sheriff's Office for residents who want to schedule an appointment.

He also plans to take it to community functions, school events and church gatherings -- or anywhere else requested -- so parents can register their children, their own parents or themselves.

"This is a great way to identify people," Sexton said, "and this will be the way of the future. We're just getting out ahead of it."

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