

Radar used to study snow, sleet, rain

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The University of Helsinki has acquired a state-of-the-art polarimetric weather radar to study the physics of rain clouds, snow and sleet.

Snowfall and its polarimetric measurements have hardly been studied anywhere else in the world, the researchers said.

The first test measurements of the prototype radar built for the university's radar laboratory provided good evidence for the potential of a polarization weather radar.

The largest road traffic catastrophe in the Helsinki metropolitan area took place March 17, 2005, with several multiple pile-ups.

The new radar was just undergoing test runs and it immediately revealed the meteorological factors which led to the accidents.

Radar images showed the road conditions before the accident were dry and cold with only slight snowfall. However, super-cooled water in the air made the road surfaces slippery immediately prior to the accidents.

At the time of the accidents, a narrow band of snow suddenly reduced visibility.

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