Scientists develop 'tricorder' sensor

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In an example of science imitating science fiction, U.S. researchers are developing a Star Trek-type sensor to detect bioweapons in sealed packages.

The futuristic device, co-developed by physicist John Miller Jr. at the University of Houston, was conceived after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, National Geographic News reported.

The device, as now designed, detects electrical signals emitted by biochemical reactions in cells, such as in sealed container, without the risk of opening suspect packages.

But its potential uses, once perfected, are numerous, including disease detection and "life detectors" to search for extraterrestrial organisms, said Miller.

An advantage of such an instrument, Miller told NGN, is it doesn't have to be tuned for predetermined biological markers, such as DNA or proteins.

A unit operating on a Mars rover, for example, could detect any biochemical action of a living organism without having to be programmed for a specific biological process.