

British government to fund 3D laser cameras for highway crash site investigations

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Image: Wikipedia

(PhysOrg.com) -- One of the banes of modern existence is surely the time spent in traffic backups. Oftentimes these backups occur as the result of accidents and the resulting investigative work that goes on before cleanup can commence. Such work must be done in order verify what occurred during an accident for both legal and financial reasons, thus, there is little chance of simply doing away with some of them. There does appear to be hope of developing new ways to do that detective work though, as new technology is developed to help speed things along. One of these new technologies involves the use of laser equipped 3D cameras and computer technology, instead of old fashioned photography and legwork.

The way things are done now is, investigative officers use measuring

tape or string to calculate the distance between crashed vehicles, length of skid-marks, etc. They then take photographs of the scene; afterwards, the data is analyzed and graphs and reports made. The use of new [laser technology](#) however can reduce the time it takes to do all of these things. The laser camera, mounted on a tripod, is panned slowly over a portion of the scene during which objects in the scene are automatically measured for distance and multiple line segments created to replicate what is found, resulting in a 360 degree [high-resolution image](#).

Using such a system is far more accurate (within millimeters) than that done by hand measuring and a single sweep takes only about four minutes to complete, and the typical crash scene generally requires only four sweeps, which means the whole operation can be done in just fifteen or twenty minutes.

Because of this the [British government](#) has announced that it is providing £2.7 million in funding to several police districts for the purchase of 37 of the laser camera systems, which should, the government says, cut backup times by an average of 39 minutes.

The camera systems were developed independently by the Austrian based company RIEGL and the Swiss company Leica Geosystems. The two types of laser camera systems offer slightly different features, such as differences in the size of the beam deployed and the use of GPS to precisely pinpoint the accident locale. One system typically costs approximately £50,000.

Many people that study technology trends expect that such camera systems will soon become the norm for accident investigations in most countries and that new features will be added, such as using the data recovered to create animations that demonstrate very clearly what went on prior to, and during a crash, thus removing all doubt.

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