

# British police get 360 degree accident scene camera

May 3 2012, by Bob Yirka

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(Phys.org) -- When car accidents happen, typically road closures soon follow. This is because police need to study the scene to try to determine what happened, who was at fault, etc. Part of that investigation involves measuring things such as length of skid marks, distance between vehicles, or even how much a car compressed during impact; all of which takes a considerable amount of time while still leaving room for errors. Now, a new way of recording accident scenes is being used by

police in Essex England. It's the RIEGL VZ-400 - part camera, part scanner that is able to faithfully record an accident scene in a 360° panorama.

The VZ-400 works by making use of both a 3D camera and a laser beam. The camera records imagery while the laser beam is used to fix objects in the images so that distances can be calculated. When put to use, the device slowly turns taking in and capturing 120,000 minute details every second of the scene around it. Afterwards, the information that is recorded is processed and a detailed 3D panorama is produced that allows officials to take a virtual tour of the crash scene whenever they wish, including during court proceedings.

One of the highlights of the virtual tour is the ability to see distances between objects, displayed by the use of colored lines and numbers. Thus, [police](#), insurance adjusters and other officials can use the calculated data to arrive at better estimates of how crashes likely occurred.

Because the new device is so adept at capturing crash scene information, Essex police plan to use it for recording crime scenes as well, which can produce information that, authorities are quick to point out, can be used in trial proceedings.

Test trials have shown that the VZ-400 typically produces a third more data than police officers on the scene at traffic accidents, and takes less than half the time to get the job done, meaning road closure times should be dramatically reduced. In tests done in London, road closures were shortened on average by an hour and a half.

Even at the steep price of £108,000 (\$175,000) apiece, twenty five police departments in Britain have announced that they too will be purchasing and using the new devices, though still unclear is just how

many each department will be able to afford.

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