

National eye scan database grows

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Twenty-six states are participating in an eye-scanning project that helps identify missing children or adults afflicted with memory loss.

Nationwide, an effort is under way to image irises of 5 million children into a database over the next few years, the Houston Chronicle said Friday. Sheriff's departments, including the Galveston County (Texas) Sheriff's Department in Texas, in 46 states have committed to the project.

The system can scan an eye and match an iris in about five seconds after comparing it with stored images, Biometric Intelligence & Identification President Sean Mullin said. Children with an iris scan in the system cannot be identified unless they are in a county that has the Children's Identification Database Project equipment.

Mullin said an iris has 235 identifying characteristics that are unchanging after the age of 1. The chance for an incorrect match is roughly one in about 200 million.

Privacy questions have been addressed by programming the database to delete a scan once a child reaches 18 years, unless the child remains listed as missing, company officials said. Also, only enough information to locate parents, or family in the case of an elderly person, would be entered.

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