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Orleans cruisers to get voice-command systems

By Matthew Belson

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ORLEANS — It's not exactly Buck Rogers, but the Orleans Police Department is poised to take a technological leap with the installation of a voice-activated control system in one of its police cruisers. The new hardware and software will enable a police officer to activate and control the systems in a standard police cruiser such as turning on the lights and sirens, and doing a records check of a license and registration through voice commands.

"Normally a police officer has to stop and pull over and manually type in the information," said Kevin Russell, a representative of 54ward, a New York-based company that is marketing the voice control program to police departments.

During a demonstration at the Orleans Police Department Tuesday, Russell said the CORE Command program uses the existing equipment in a standard police cruiser. A box in the trunk holds the components for the radio, radar, video and light bar, and links via plug-and-play cables to a laptop computer mounted to the right of the driver. The laptops are on a wireless network that covers the Cape.

While driving, Russell said an officer can press a button to turn on the microphone mounted above the sun visor and to access information such as running a license check or switching radio channels when crossing town lines during the pursuit of a vehicle. The computer program reads the information out loud with an electronic voice.

"This is all about officer safety," said Orleans Police Lt. Kevin Wells, and the new program would enable officers to keep their eyes on the road instead of being distracted by manually operating the systems or entering information.

The second leading cause of officer fatalities nationwide is traffic related, said Russell. Gunshots is the leading cause of police fatalities.

During a routine traffic stop an officer must return to his cruiser to access the information on the laptop. With the CORE system, an officer can enter the information verbally and still observe the vehicle.

"I think it's a big safety issue and helps keep your eye on the road," said Orleans Police Officer Matthew Watts. "Any advantage we can get is a plus."

Russell said a remote microphone could also be used so an officer can access the information outside the vehicle. The CORE system will also be compatible with new technologies such as scanning barcodes on licenses and printing out a summons in the cruiser.

The system costs about \$3,000 for each vehicle and takes about a day to install the program and connect all of the equipment into the system. Once the patrol car reaches the end of its service life, Russell said the CORE system could be removed and installed in a new vehicle.



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If the computer system fails, Russell said there are manual backups to allow an officer to operate the equipment such as lights, radio and radar.

Within a month, Wells said the voice control system will be installed free of charge by 54ward as a demonstration platform for other police departments and Orleans will be the first in the state to operate the system.

The University of New Hampshire originally developed the technology.

Russell is a sales representative for police equipment and has a home in Orleans. He has a longstanding working relationship with the Orleans Police Department.

He said several police departments in Connecticut are installing the CORE system.

After 28 years' experience as a police officer, Wells is amazed by the advances in technology being used in policing. "In 1979 when you called the dispatcher for a license check, the dispatcher would have to call Barnstable County [to get the information]," he said.