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Alderman eyeing 3D cameras for cops

By MICHAEL PLATT, CALGARY SUN

Last Updated: 27th January 2010, 7:43pm

It's a crime-fighting tool straight out of Bruce Wayne's Batcave.

And for less than \$200,000, it's hoped the Leica ScanStation C10 will provide superhero levels of relief to Calgary motorists, clearing major crash scenes in minutes, rather than hours.

"If it can really maximize police resources, and it means they don't have to tie up traffic for hours while they investigate, then it's something we should be looking at," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

Costing \$115,000 for the device, plus another \$85,000 for software and training, the C10 is a high-definition laser surveying scanner.

In layman's terms, that means it's a really impressive camera.

And if you're a layman stuck in traffic, what's impressive is the C10's ability to speed up tedious and time-consuming police work.

What traditionally required hours with measuring tapes, ordinary cameras and notepads now takes only a few minutes, while providing a permanent and detailed record for police and lawyers.

The camera, sitting atop a tripod, scans the entire scene with lasers, recording details down to the 360-degree, three-dimensional millimetre.

"A room that would take hours now would take less than five minutes," said Richard Andrews of Spatial Technologies, the company working with Calgary Police to test the C10 scanner.

Once the scan is complete, the scene can be cleared. If it's a crash, the wreckage can be removed, and traffic can get back to normal.

Police can then review the scene at will, while judge and jury can virtually visit the location, if the evidence is needed in court.

Of course, the C10 and technology like it does more than record skid marks and debris at crash scenes, though for the average Calgarian, having roads reopened in minutes is the obvious benefit.

The Calgary Police Service is currently weighing the benefit of such cameras, after watching police forces across the U.S. put them to work for all manner of crimes, including murders and shootings.

"We're aware of the technology, and we are looking at it," said Calgary Police spokesman Kevin Brookwell.

Various systems, including the ScanStation C10 are being considered, and tested.

"We see tremendous value in that kind of technology," said Brookwell.

Three-dimensional scanning been so successful as a crime-scene tool in the U.S. and Europe that A&E has developed an entire television show around the technology, called "Crime 360."

In Georgia, police recently used a ScanStation in court to replay a fatal gunfight between two men, while Pennsylvania State Police used one to record the scene of the Amish school shooting in 2006.

In France, British police employed the camera to film the tunnel where Princess Diana was killed, during the 2006 Operation Paget investigation reviewing her death.

The L.A. Country Sheriff crime lab now has two of the Leica cameras for use for major incidents, including the 2008 Chatsworth train disaster.

On it goes, from Albuquerque to Texas.

Police forces which can afford the technology are praising the 3D cameras as the magnifying glass and fingerprint dusters of the modern era.

It's expected they will also prove invaluable in cold cases, when the exact crime scene can be duplicated decades later.

It's clearly the next step in police technology, and that's why Colley-Urquhart is keen to see them used in Calgary. That's providing the local police force determines they are something worth spending \$200,000 on.

She's selling the 3D scanner to the public as a traffic-clearing tool, knowing Calgarians are sick of seeing major roads reduced to a single lane for hours, as the measuring tapes are employed.

But Colley-Urquhart, who sits on the Calgary Police Commission, knows the camera would also be used for major crimes and incidents.

She just hopes city council supports the technology, once the police force requests it.

"It's definitely something I'll take forward and discuss with the police service, to see if they plan to include it in their next operating budget," said Colley-Urquhart.

"If it's something the police request, I'll absolutely support it."

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