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Scanner finds hidden objects, not flesh The Boston Globe



Millivision's scanner marks hidden objects in red on a video image (right); other systems outline a person's body (left). (Millivision Inc.)

By [Dave Copeland](#)
Globe Correspondent / April 27, 2009

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MBTA transit police officer Daniele Pugliese stepped into a closet-size scanner, and within six seconds his video image appeared on a computer monitor in a nearby control booth. Moments later, red marks appeared on the image, indicating objects in Pugliese's pockets, including a metal whistle in his shirt pocket.

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But the device went one step further than a metal detector - it also put a red X over his pants pocket, where he kept a plastic beeper.

"I think the bad guys know this: If you make weapons that are not metallic, you're home free," said Paul E. Nicholas, president of Millivision Inc., based in Deerfield. The company makes the machine now being tested by the MBTA to book suspects.

Millivision is moving into the highly competitive market for threat-detection systems, but company officials say it has an advantage over competitors. They say the Millivision system is less invasive than others being tested at some US airports that critics call "virtual strip searches." Nicholas also noted the system does not emit radiation, as competing systems do, and said its software - which uses red marks to indicate objects it detects - is unique.

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The MBTA has been testing the system for three months, using it as a secondary screening system after suspects have been patted down. The law prohibits strip searches until a suspect has been arraigned, and in the past that has meant some have been able to sneak contraband into holding cells. That can range from weapons to plastic lighters that can be used to start fires.

"Any advances in technology that keep our officers safe, keep people in our custody safe, and keep the public safe is something we're going to be interested in," said Joseph O'Connor, MBTA Transit Police Department deputy chief.

Millivision is marketing its product at a time when the federal Transportation Security Administration has said it plans to replace walk-through metal detectors at airports with whole-body imaging machines. The competing products essentially provide screeners with an image of the naked body and have been criticized by groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union. They're also more expensive to operate, Nicholas said, because they require both a male and female operator to view the images.

Those systems, being tested at six airports, use a technology known as active millimeter wave screening. The TSA plans to install the systems in 19 airports this year, though not at Logan International Airport in Boston.

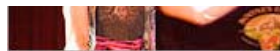
Millivision uses passive millimeter wave screening, which allows it to detect ceramics, metals, plastics, and liquids without rendering an image of a naked body. Both types of systems cost between \$150,000 and \$180,000, Nicholas said.

Nicholas said he still sees Millivision making inroads in the aviation industry. But the company's system is also being used by police departments and electric utilities that want to prevent attacks on control centers and power plants.

In addition, Millivision is in talks with European air transportation regulatory agencies, which stopped installing the active millimeter wave screening systems because of the privacy concerns.

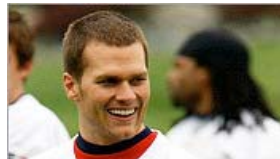
"Privacy is really the thing people are concerned about right now," Nicholas said. ■

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dpbsmith wrote:

The system still "sees" a body under the clothing, even if a computer displays only the suspicious features.

I'd bet that the system provides a way of displaying the unprocessed image, if only for calibration and testing, and that the operators know how to invoke that mode.

Perhaps, if the automated red-marker system seems ambiguous or inconclusive, operators might routinely go to the unprocessed image to see a more precise image.

4/27/2009 7:16 AM EDT

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