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UNH's high-tech police cruiser wins national following

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Project54, the innovative police cruiser technology developed by University of New Hampshire researchers, is being installed by law enforcement agencies in states beyond New Hampshire.

The Maryland State Police is starting by installing Project54 in 90 cars and is considering converting its entire patrol fleet of 1,000 vehicles. "We looked at other systems, but they all had inherent dangers to the police officers. For example, if the computer crashed, the officer couldn't use the radio," said Lt. Chet Smith. "We think that Project54 has the best working system out there of the ones that we've seen."

The technology — which gives police voice-activated control of devices such as light bars, sirens, radios, records checks, radar guns, video cameras, license scanners and GPS units — has been installed in 250 New Hampshire vehicles to date, with more state and local police cruisers scheduled to receive it.

The Carlsbad, Calif., Police Department already has installed Project54 in 20 of its cruisers, with plans to do so in all 50 of its squad cars. Capt. Dale Stockton of the Carlsbad police said that Project54's hands-free control is allowing his department to equip its patrol cars with modern office technology without distracting drivers.

"I really believe in this," said Stockton. "I think it is an incredible addition to the patrol car in terms of functionality and safety."

U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., who secured initial funding for Project54 in 1999, recently secured an additional \$5.75 million for 2005. The money was allocated for three areas: \$3 million for further development and testing; \$2 million for deployment with local police departments; and \$750,000 for records interoperability at the New Hampshire Division of Motor Vehicles.

The funding also has paid for data server computers, records management software and dispatching upgrades for the New Hampshire Department of Safety to integrate police cruisers into statewide data networks and help automate the handling of law enforcement information.

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150 Dow St., Manchester, NH 03101 (603) 624-1442