

Technology and Crime Control

Technology, while it has increased criminal opportunity, has also been a boon to police investigators and other justice system personnel. We will now look at technology's impact on the arsenal of crime-fighting and administrative techniques available to criminal justice practitioners.

Law enforcement access to high-technology investigative tools has produced enormous amounts of information on crimes and suspects, and the use of innovative investigative tools like DNA fingerprinting, keystroke captures, laser and night vision technologies, digital imaging, and thermography are beginning to shape many of the practical aspects of the twenty-first-century criminal justice system (Table 18-1). Today, some laptop computers and vehicles are programmed to contact police when they are stolen and provide satellite-based tracking information so authorities can

The crucial component of effective policing in a rapidly changing world is the ability to think creatively about emerging technologies and how they can be used successfully within the constitutional limits of a free society.

—Thomas J. Cowper,
New York State Police^{iv}

**SPECIAL TECHNOLOGIES USED BY LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS,
BY SIZE OF POPULATION SERVED, 2000**

Population Served	Percentage of Agencies Using								
	Night Vision/Electro-Optic			Vehicle Stopping/Tracking			Digital Imaging		
	Infrared (Thermal) Imagers	Image Intensifiers	Laser Range Finders	Tire Deflation Spikes	Stolen Vehicle Tracking	Electrical/Engine Disruption	Mug Shots	Suspect Composites	Fingerprints
All sizes	11%	6%	6%	26%	5%	—% ^a	29%	16%	11%
1,000,000 or more	73	53	40	47	73	20	87	60	80
500,000-999,999	47	36	26	38	62	9	83	53	79
250,000-499,999	58	33	23	60	35	5	63	45	68
100,000-249,999	40	17	19	56	37	2	70	55	66
50,000-99,999	27	17	19	52	25	1	71	41	52
25,000-49,999	28	14	15	45	22	0	58	43	29
10,000-24,999	16	10	9	40	10	—	50	27	13
2,500-9,999	11	4	5	27	3	0	28	13	5
Under 2,500	4	3	2	15	1	—	13	7	6

^a— = less than 0.5%.

Source: Matthew J. Hickman and Brian A. Reaves, *Local Police Departments, 2000* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003), p. 22.

TABLE 18-1
SPECIAL TECHNOLOGIES USED BY LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS, BY SIZE OF POPULATION SERVED, 2000

Police officers in Ottawa, Canada, arrest a car thief snared in a bait car program while news cameras roll. Bait cars, now in use in more than 100 cities across the United States and in some other countries, demonstrate how advancing technology can serve law enforcement needs.

Michael Houston, Ottawa Police Service



Car Thieves Beware!
"Bait Car" Program Here
Voleurs de voitures,
prenez garde!
me de voiture-appât
our ici

determine their whereabouts. A number of rental car companies, for example, now have cars equipped with systems that can receive instruction from a central location. These instructions can be used to prevent the car from starting and thus being stolen. The system can also track the car as it moves. Likewise, some police departments are using high-technology bait cars to catch auto thieves.⁶⁰ Bait cars can signal when stolen, send digitized images of perpetrators to investigators, radio their position to officers, be remotely immobilized, and lock their doors on command, trapping thieves inside.

Another crime-fighting technology making headway in the identification of stolen vehicles is automatic plate recognition (APR) technology. In December 2004, for example, the Ohio State Highway Patrol completed a four-month evaluation of an APR system using infrared cameras mounted at strategic points along the state's highways and connected to computers to alert troopers to the possible presence of stolen vehicles or wanted persons. During the four-month test period, the system led to the apprehension of 23 criminal suspects and the recovery of 24 stolen vehicles.⁶¹

Car thieves, however, have made some technological advances of their own, including the "laundering" of vehicle identification numbers (VINs), which allows stolen cars to be sold as legitimate vehicles. In mid-2005, for example, the National Insurance Crime Bureau reported that about 600 luxury cars and SUVs had been seized during the previous 12 months whose VIN numbers had been removed and replaced with numbers copied from nonstolen vehicles.⁶² Stolen cars with "cloned" VIN numbers are usually not discovered until an insurance claim is filed, and investigators learn that there are two or more vehicles registered with the same VIN numbers to people in different locals.

As these stories indicate, the future will no doubt see a race between technologically sophisticated offenders and law enforcement authorities to determine who can wield the most advanced technical skills in the age-old battle between crime and justice.⁶³



Log on to ResearchNavigator.com, and choose "All" under the *New York Times* subject archive section. Enter the phrase "computer crime" (without the quotation marks) in the search box, and click "Go." From the results page, select four articles related to criminal justice that you find interesting. Write a summary of each article, including complete source information—that is, article title, author (if available), date of