Police embrace digital fingerprints
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THE South Australia police force has been handed a hi-tech weapon in the fight against
crime. Its new Livescan digital fingerprinting units will allow automatic print processing
through a national database.
South Australia is the fifth state to adopt Livescan, which uses lasers to scan prints and
detect errors, rather than taking wet prints and scanning from paper forms.
NSW has units deployed statewide, and Victoria uses the system.
The South Australian project follows a trial at Elizabeth in Adelaide's northern suburbs.
Senior Sergeant Dean Greenless of the South Australia police fingerprint branch said the
units, to be distributed to the state's 14 local police commands, would reduce printing
errors and enable faster access to criminal databases.
The kiosk-size devices are manufactured in the US by Motorola subsidiary Printrak.
Using the old wet-ink method, suspects were often bailed before information came back
on previous convictions and unsolved crimes.
"The difficulty with the old method is when we had someone, especially at a remote
location, it was taking two to three days to scan the fingerprints, by which stage people
had been charged and bailed," Sergeant Greenlees said.
The old method of taking prints with ink and a roller meant a hard copy had to be
scanned into a computer and sent to the National Automated Fingerprint Identification
System.
"This system gives police better information for making bail decisions," he said.
Using Livescan, officers take a suspect's prints and the data is sent to the fingerprint
branch for confirmation before it is processed through CrimTrac's NAFIS.
Data on identity and unsolved crimes can be sent to police within 10 to 15 minutes.
The CrimTrac network runs on the Australian Federal Police system, and connects via
POPs in each state to the various state police WANs.
CrimTrac – which maintains a DNA database and other records – processed 7000
Livescan queries in March 2003.
Because of Livescan's cost, South Australia will retain wet-ink fingerprinting for some
remote locations.
"We can have a set of prints taken at Port Augusta, in the mid-north and as soon as
they're taken they will be sent to CrimTrac, and the database searched immediately,"
Sergeant Greenlees said.
State police forces have been taking on new technology – including digital radios, covert
surveillance cameras and biometric devices – at a rapid rate.
NSW police have also installed a facial recognition system known as Phototrack at major stations to supplement Livescan in identifying suspects.

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