



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 14, 2011

Law Enforcement to Use Facial Recognition Equipment

Law enforcement officers across the country are preparing to make widespread use of facial recognition equipment to identify people based on a picture of their face or a scan of their iris, or on a fingerprint reader. And concerns have already been raised among the liberty-minded over how the information would be gathered and used.

The Mobile Offender Recognition and Information System (MORIS), produced by B12 Technologies of Plymouth, Massachusetts, runs on the iPhone platform. B12 officials report that the company already has contracts with 40 government agencies to deliver 1,000 devices.



The *Wall Street Journal* [details](#) how the device works:

To scan a person's iris, police officers can hold the special iris-scanning camera on [the] device, called MORIS, about 5 to 6 inches away from an individual's irises. After snapping a high resolution photo, the MORIS system analyzes 235 unique features in each iris and uses an algorithm to match that person with their identity if they are in the database.

For the facial recognition, an officer takes a photo of a person at a distance of about 2 feet to 5 feet. Based on technologies from Animetrics Inc., the system analyzes about 130 distinguishing points on the face, such as the distance between a person's eye and nose. It then scans the database for likely matches.

The device automatically scans known databases in search of criminal warrants and does not require the separate use of a digital camera.

Whether consent is required for the use of the equipment is questionable, but *The Blaze* notes that in general, "the law does not prohibit taking photos of people in a public place." It adds, however,

But taking and storing photos for law enforcement purposes — particularly if the subject is in custody — could trigger a different standard of rules. The law becomes even more vague on issues such as whether an iris scan constitutes a search.

Similar technology has already been used by the military to help distinguish allies from terrorists and insurgents; however, this will be the first widespread use of a mobile device for the purpose of law enforcement.

Law enforcement officials are defending the use of the MORIS, pointing out that it could prevent the wrong inmates from being released from prison, identify accident victims, and keep track of the homeless.

However, the potential uses for the device have drawn criticism from civil liberties and privacy groups — groups which raised similar concerns when the city of Chicago began using surveillance cameras



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which include facial recognition software and are able to track a person's movement. Though the city asserted that the cameras were intended to track objects, not people, former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff admitted, "I don't think there is another city in the U.S. that has as extensive and integrated a camera network as Chicago has."

The ACLU of Illinois, after reporting on the city's 10,000 cameras — which are operated by police, public transportation agencies, and private businesses — concluded that there was potential for privacy concerns:

Chicago's camera network invades the freedom to be anonymous in public places, a key aspect of the fundamental American right to be left alone. Each of us then will wonder whether the government is watching and recording us when we walk into a psychiatrist's office, a reproductive health care center, a political meeting, a theater performance, or a bookstore.

Still, like all advocates of invasive security devices, Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley defended the surveillance system as a necessary security tactic, calling it a cost-effective way to fight crime that has helped authorities respond to crimes more efficiently. "We're not spying on anybody," he assured the Windy City residents.

It was Founding Father Benjamin Franklin who observed: "He who trades liberty for a little temporary security deserves neither liberty nor security."

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[Good picture here:

<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/are-u-s-cops-preparing-widespread-use-of-facial-recognition-iphone/>]



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