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### Project54 Ten Years Strong

 By [Jody Record](#), Media Relations

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Ten years ago, state police officers in New Hampshire activated the lights and sirens in their patrol cars the old way, by flicking a switch or pressing a button. To use the radar detection or talk to their dispatch center, they had to do the same thing.

Imagine a police officer trying to utilize more than one of these devices while traveling down the highway at 75 miles an hour in pursuit of a suspect. Add in the newer technology now standard in cruisers--computers, GPS systems, video recording equipment—and safety becomes a critical factor.

But that was 10 years ago. Since 2000, law enforcement officials around the state, starting with the state police and now including municipalities, have been able to turn their equipment on and off without taking their hands off the wheel, thanks to the voice-activated technology developed in UNH's CATlab.

To date, more than 1,000 emergency vehicles in New Hampshire have been outfitted with Project54's (named for the 1960s television show *Car 54 Where Are You?*) hands-free software. The program was launched in 1999 with \$4 million from the U.S. Department of Justice and the support from U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg.

One feature that has been the focus of development since its inception 10 years ago is the ability to access databases. That means, instead of asking a dispatcher to run a license plate check, for example, it can be done from the officer's patrol car.

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"In 1999, the state-of-the-art was to get on the radio and ask dispatch," says Andrew Kun, associate professor in the electrical and computer engineering department.



The Project54 technology can be voice or touch activated. A handheld device allowing an officer to make data inquiries from outside the car is in the process of being developed.

"We are constantly working on interoperable technologies that can talk to each other," says research engineer Oskar Palinko.



Alex Shyrovov photo

Additionally, there is a full-size driving simulator in the laboratory at Morse Hall where the equipment is tested so researchers know how well drivers perform using Project54. The setup has a car model and a virtual street that runs on three screens.

Cameras mounted on the dash of the car record the driver's eye movements, helping researchers to evaluate where drivers look while they drive. The simulator can also keep track of lane position and reaction time to sudden events, which is very useful in evaluating how safely drivers operate the simulated vehicle.

A new onsite garage helps undergraduates get hands-on experience.

Bill Lenharth, founder of the InterOperability Laboratory, and Tom Miller, professor of electrical and computer engineering, cofounded the CATlab and Project54 in 1999.

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