

Sheriff adding portable fingerprint scanners

By Andrea F. Siegel
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Anne Arundel County sheriff's deputies will soon add a portable wireless fingerprint scanner to their crime-fighting tools to help quickly determine how much of a threat a person may pose and whether the person is wanted by other law enforcement agencies.

Sheriff Ronald S. Bateman said the handheld tool will help deputies identify people

faster when deputies are trying to serve protective orders, warrants and eviction notices.

"This really gives you a chance to say, 'You are who you say you are — or you're not,'" he said.

"It helps us ID the bad guys," he said.

"It does not give us probable cause to arrest someone. It gives us reason to check further," Bateman said.

Although a person must give his or her name to a law enforcement officer if asked,

a person does not have to provide a fingerprint immediately.

Sgt. Jennifer Gilbert-Duran said the unit will help in situations such as when people lie about their identity to avoid warrant service.

The scanner is a little smaller than a television remote control unit and has a pad where a person places the ball of a finger. The unit takes about two minutes to search Maryland's automated fingerprint database and the federal databases of known

and suspected terrorists, sex offenders and people wanted by federal officials.

The word "hit" appears if a fingerprint match is found, and someone must follow up to check what kind of hit is returned. Fingerprints can be in the state system for any number of reasons, including because the person works for a law enforcement agency.

Basic information, such as the person's name and date of birth, turns up on deputies. See **FINGERPRINTS**, page 6

FROM PAGE ONE

Sheriff's office adding portable fingerprint scanners

FINGERPRINTS, From page 1

ties' in-car computers, and deputies can then ask their dispatchers to check for unserved warrants and a photo or they can access the systems themselves.

The office bought six of Cogent Systems' BlueCheck fingerprint scanners — two for domestic violence units, three for warrant teams and one for court security — using a \$10,000 federal grant. Officials said they expect to have the system operating and deputies trained by mid-November.

Other law enforcement agencies are acquiring similar portable fingerprint systems or are looking into them, Bateman said.

The Anne Arundel County Police Department is looking into similar technology, said Police Lt. Francis Tewey.

"Our idea is more of a field booking-type thing, or investigative purposes," he said. For example, officers could fingerprint bank employees quickly when they respond to a call about a bank robbery, which could speed up eliminating possible suspects and narrowing down the remaining prints, he said.

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