# Virtual tool helps police clear road wrecks faster

**Local news**

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El Paso motorists often are frustrated when roadways are shut down for hours as police investigate serious traffic accidents with deaths.

But police now have a new tool that will allow them to investigate wrecks more quickly and open up roadways.

On-scene investigations of fatal collisions averaged about three hours last year, said Sgt. Paul Ramsey of the Special Traffic Investigations Unit of the El Paso Police Department.

The department's new photogrammetry system -- a measurement technology allowing police to reconstruct crash scenes in virtual form with specialized software and digital cameras -- has been used four times since December and has already cut down the time investigators spend at crash sites.

"So far we are averaging an hour and 45 minutes with the photogrammetry system, so we are seeing a significant reduction," Ramsey said.

He said the new system speeds up field investigations because police are able to capture multiple mapping points for diagrams with a single photograph.

Laser technology, the system the department has relied on for diagramming serious accidents, requires police to shoot each diagram mapping point separately. Both are equally accurate, he said.

Police bought the new technology last year through a state grant to try to reduce traffic congestion caused by wrecks.

Ramsey said police spent about $40,000.

"Our goal is to conduct an accurate and thorough traffic investigation and get traffic moving as quickly as possible thereafter," Ramsey said.

East El Paso resident Adrian Campos said he welcomes efforts by police to improve traffic flow because more than once he has found himself in traffic snarled by a wreck on the freeway.

"I've noticed that when there is a fatality on I-10, they stop traffic if they can, which is fine because it's a crime scene," Campos said.

But sometimes those traffic tie-ups led him to miss important business appointments, so Campos said he wants police to continue to speed up their investigations of collisions without compromising the evidence or assistance to victims.

Police reported 74 collisions resulting in fatal or life-threatening injuries last year. Those collisions killed a total of 53 people.

Ramsey said police reconstruct sites of serious wrecks to determine how they happened. The diagrams are also used as evidence when collisions result in criminal charges.

Though the new technology gets traffic investigators off the roadways faster, it has not altered the man-hours it takes to construct a diagram of a crash site.

Ramsey said that using laser technology, police spent more time at a crash site and less time on a computer creating a diagram of the incident.

Using photogrammetry, investigators spend less time at a wreck site and more time on a computer reconstructing the scene in a virtual format.

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