

# Suffolk mulls flying GPS to end car chases

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A new technology could turn Suffolk police cruisers into something like Batmobiles and put an end to high-speed pursuits.

Suffolk police are considering modifying their patrol cars to let officers shoot a sticky homing device -- equipped with global positioning system technology -- that latches onto a suspect's fleeing vehicle.

Trevor Fischbach, the company's vice president for business development and sales.

"The initial results have been very promising," said Sgt. Dan Gomez, who is in charge of the LAPD's tactical technology unit and has seen a prototype tested on a departmental car.

Critics have questioned the need for police pursuits because they put officers and bystanders in harm's way.

Last year, 181 police pursuits were logged in Suffolk, including one that killed a Farmingdale man in December. Tim Motz, a department spokesman, said Suffolk does not have statistics regarding how many chases resulted in injuries or deaths.

In Nassau, 52 police pursuits last year resulted in 26 accidents and injured 13 people, including officers, department spokesman Sgt. Anthony Repalone said.

On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that police are permitted to pursue a fleeing suspect even when the officer's tactics endanger the suspect's life. The court did not address third-party injuries, such as the case of the Farmingdale man.

William Calhoun, 59, was killed after the car of a suspect fleeing from police crashed into his living room. Suffolk police said Richard Mair, 29, fled after being approached in North Amityville by officers who suspected he was dealing drugs.

Calhoun's family has initiated a lawsuit against Nassau and Suffolk, seeking \$20 million in damages.

"Hopefully, it is something that can stop high-speed chases," Calhoun's son, Brian, said about the StarChase system.

The StarChase Pursuit Management System is not ready for sale yet, Fischbach said, and the price for the package has not been determined. However, Cameron said the company gave him a preliminary price of "several thousand" dollars per police vehicle.

The disposable projectile -- Gomez said the prototype he saw resembles a soda can, only smaller -- contains a small GPS receiver, a radio transmitter and a battery. The nose is coated with an adhesive that sticks to the vehicle.

Each unit can discharge two tags from a distance of about 20 feet, Fischbach said.

The tag broadcasts its position, allowing officers to follow at a slower speed. The suspect, sooner or later, has to stop. "That's when they can put a net around the guy," Fischbach said.

Gomez said each time he has seen the tag launched, it stuck to the intended target. "The device itself makes a thud sound," he said. "It's similar to the sound you would hear from a paintball gun, just bigger."

More than 300 police departments have inquired about the system since an early version was shown to the International Association of Chiefs of Police in 2005, Fischbach said.

If this summer's field tests are successful, Suffolk Police Commissioner Richard Dormer said his department would purchase the system for a pilot project for its fleet of vehicles.

"It's incumbent upon us to look at new technology to manage pursuits because it's a high-risk activity and the potential for injury is high," he said.

Repalone said Nassau police are not interested in the system at the moment.