

Mobile bomb detecting system unveiled

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By Heather Ishimaru

LIVERMORE, CA (KGO) -- The lights and siren go off when an SUV drives by a tiny amount of cesium 137, a radiological isotope that could be used in a dirty bomb. The vehicle is carrying a detection system developed by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory that can detect concealed radioactive material the size of a grain of sand moving at 45 MPH. Not only can the system detect the material, it can also identify it." We drive by the source, count rate goes up and in real time, plain English, identifies industrial cesium 137 has now been detected," Brian Adlawan of Textron Defense Systems said. Textron has licensed the technology and has already sold a fleet of SUVs outfitted with the system to New Jersey and another, unidentified state. A stationary system is in place on the border of a Western state as well. There are many safe, naturally occurring radiological substances in nature; the trick is identifying the threatening ones. A trailer truck full of bananas would register potassium, but the new system would know to dismiss it." You don't want law enforcement to bring Homeland Security and law enforcement to bear on a container full of bananas," Adlawan said. Once detected, the data is immediately sent to law enforcement agencies and scientists for more analysis. Following September 11, 2001, scientists worked closely with law enforcement agencies to find out what type of systems would be most useful." We can develop the greatest technology in the world,

but if it isn't friendly for the cop, or the cop can't use it, or stays in the trunk of his car then it's useless," Howard Hall said. Hall is the head of Lawrence Livermore's radiological detection and response program. The system is portable enough that law enforcement officials can take it out of the vehicle and put it on a boat for a harbor control mission, put it on an airplane or scan cargo with it, Adlawan said. The lab's detection system has already begun proven itself. The unit positioned at the border detected uranium entering the country in a commercial delivery truck, but that uranium system had been cleared for entry.