

Airport tests out new iris-scanning technology

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BOSTON (AP) - Employees' irises would become their identification badges under a new security system that Logan International Airport began testing last week.

Logan, which has gained national recognition for its aggressive pursuit of new security measures since Sept. 11, is trying the iris recognition system on two entrances to secure areas of the airport, according to aviation director Tom Kinton.

In addition to using an access card and punching in a security code, a group of Massport employees participating in the pilot project will also have to look into a camera that will scan and verify their unique iris codes.

The iris is the colored ring that encircles the pupil of the eye.

"It's another layer of security," Kinton said. "People could steal the card or the number, but not this."

Logan is the second airport in the country to test the technology. New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport began testing it for employee access two weeks ago.

The system, which is being pitched by Tier Technologies, of Walnut Grove, Calif., and LG Electronics, USA, based in Seoul, South Korea, analyzes the unique muscle and tissue patterns in the colored ring around every individual's pupils.

As part of the testing at Logan, a video image will be taken of employees' eyes. The iris portion will be extracted and then saved in a database as a distinct code. When entering through the doors that are part of the test, the employees will look into a camera that will make sure the codes match.

The technology, which has been around for about 10 years, is also being used at a few airports internationally and at several U.S. government sites, including the State Department, according to Richard Roth, president of Counter Technology Inc., a security consulting company.

One bank in Texas is using it to verify the identity of their ATM customers, Roth said.

CTI and Roth have helped Logan evaluate technologies in the past. The company has not yet consulted with Logan about the iris-scanning technology, Roth said.

Logan previously tested facial recognition, another form of **biometrics**, but determined it was "not ready for prime-time," according to Roth.

Kinton said that the technology, which compares passengers' facial characteristics to images

stored in a database, was accurate but slow.

"It did exactly what they said it would do," Kinton said. "But from a speed standpoint, it needs to be further developed."

The iris-scanning system, on the other hand, compares an individual's unique "iris code" to a database within a matter of seconds, according to Mohammed Murad, director of systems integration sales and business development for LG Electronics' Iris Technology Division.

Another advantage of the system, Roth said, is that it registers very few false positive identifications. And compared to finger-print reading, he said, it is very hard to "**spoo**f" or fool.

The possible downsides, he said, are its expense and concerns about its affect on people's eyes. Roth and Murad say the concerns about eye damage are unfounded.

Kinton said there are other unanswered questions, such as whether it works outdoors and how effective it is on people with glasses or contacts.

According to Murad, the cost of an iris recognition system starts at about \$3,000 per door. While in the pilot stage, however, the system is costing Massport nothing, Kinton said.

The companies approached Logan about testing their system because "they're trying to take a leadership role in security," according to Jim Weaver, president and chief operating officer of Tier Technologies.

Logan has applied to the federal Transportation Security Administration, which took over aviation security in February, to become one of several pilot airports for emerging technology.

No airports have yet been selected.

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