

Pennsylvania State Police

Testing Confirms that PSP Radar Units are Accurate

Independent, detailed testing conducted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Engineering, Department of Electrical Engineering, on Decatur Genesis Handheld radar units used by State Police has confirmed that the units produce accurate readings when used for speed enforcement.

State Police commissioned the study in response to a recommendation from the Office of Inspector General, which had received a complaint in early 2004 questioning the accuracy of the handheld units.

The Department stated at the time that although spurious readings occasionally appear on some units when they are not measuring the speed of a moving vehicle, those spurious readings are eliminated when the radar unit is used to measure a vehicle's speed. In other words, the Department said, the units are reliable and accurate.

The final conclusions of the University of Pittsburgh School of Engineering Study support the Department's position.

"In the 'non-sterile' environment such as the radar gun pointing at a moving automobile as a target, it is our opinion that the miscellaneous signals indicated throughout this report are surmounted (overcome) by the reflected signal returning to the radar gun by such an automobile," the reports states.

Under state law, all radar equipment must be tested at least every 60 days by a testing facility. In addition, State Police goes beyond the requirements of state law and requires troopers to run an internal accuracy test on every radar unit at the start of every enforcement detail and an external test of each device using a tuning fork at both the beginning and end of every detail.

Commissioner Jeffrey B. Miller said the Department has never doubted that all of its radar units produce accurate readings while being used for speed enforcement.

The special testing of the units was done by the University of Pittsburgh under an \$18,000 contract with State Police, Col. Miller said. He said that although the Department would have preferred to use the money for proactive law-enforcement activities, the Department felt it was important to reassure the public that troopers do not issue speeding citations based on faulty equipment readings.

The Department has about 540 Decatur Genesis Handheld radar units. The Department also has about 250 other radar units made by a different manufacturer.

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