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Technology may cut area gun violence

By Simon Read
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The ShotSpotter Gunshot Location System might sound like some gizmo one would find on Batman's utility belt, but in reality it's a complex piece of hardware that's helping combat gun violence in a number of American cities.

Councilman Jim Davis is hoping to bring the James Bond-ish hardware to Antioch.

"It's being applied in several cities throughout the nation, and it's technology that will only continue to get better with time," Davis said. "It makes sense to bring it here; we have high-crime areas."

Relying on "acoustic triangulation" and high-tech sensors, the ShotSpotter can pinpoint the location of gunfire across a wide geographic area, according to officials at the Santa Clara-based company that designed the system. Within 10 seconds of a gun being fired, the system can zero in on the spot and relay an address to police and emergency dispatchers.

Davis -- who has been researching the gadgetry since November -- said he would like to see the system installed within a 5-mile by 5-mile swath of the city.

"I would like to see us take a more proactive approach to crime," he said. "If we can deter criminals or catch them in the act, that would obviously be something. Just by having the publicity out there that this city has this technology, it would deter people from committing crime."

Gregg Rowland, ShotSpotter's senior vice president, said the system has been deployed with much success in Redwood City. Recently, it went to work in Oakland. Other cities using it include Washington and Los Angeles.

"It has an immediate impact," Rowland said. "We've seen four or five major arrests in cities within the first month of the system going in. It helps get the police on the scene a lot quicker."

The company has been putting the technology through its paces in Iraq, Rowland said, adding that soldiers are now wearing ShotSpotter sensors to protect against sniper fire. "It's been over there a few months now. We're hearing from the military that they're putting it everywhere."

In December, Oakland deployed the ShotSpotter, police said.

"It's been very good," said Oakland Police Officer Roland Holmgren. "We've been very happy with it and have had some successes. It's not the golden key for everything, but it's definitely helping. It's nice to see technology moving forward in a way that's helping law enforcement."

Holmgren would not disclose how many ShotSpotter systems Oakland has.

"We don't want to divulge too much about it," he said. "That would defeat the purpose of having it."

The cost of bringing ShotSpotter to Antioch, said Davis, is in the neighborhood of \$1 million. But there are a number of financing options the city could explore, from redevelopment agency funds to corporate sponsors and federal grants.

"It can detect the difference between a firecracker and a gunshot," he said. "It can tell us the caliber of the weapon, too. If the technology is out there and we can use it, why not get it?"

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