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New system for safe night driving

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WASHINGTON: Researchers from the Department of Computer Architecture and Technology at the University of Granada have created an electronic system that significantly improves driving ability at night using information extracted automatically from night visors.

The European Commission for Automobile Industry has revealed in a report that about 42 percent of fatal car accidents happen at night, despite the fact that traffic is 60 percent less during that time.

Experts say the high figures are largely due to the reduced visual acuity and field of vision at night as a consequence of the illumination from the headlights of oncoming vehicles.

Now, the researchers working in tandem within a European project called DRIVSCO, whose participants include researchers from different countries who work on real-time vision and its application to the car industry, have created this system.

The microchip, when installed in a car, makes it easier to extract the information from cameras to elements involved in driving (bends, pedestrians, cars) which might be present on the road.

In other words, this system informs drivers by means of visual, acoustic or other signs about the obstacles appearing in their way, making intelligent cars even more sophisticated.

Lead researcher Eduardo Ros Vidal said the aim of this chip is to support the illumination of the car, which is insufficient for ideal vision.

"Dipped headlights only illuminate about 56 meters when the breaking distance at 100 km/h is about 80 meters," said Prof Ros Vidal, adding that the system uses two infrared cameras placed on the car, which record the scene even further than the illumination of conventional headlights.

The chip extracts information about factors such as movement or depth in real time to improve the detection of specific elements and situations of interest, he said.

He said the system also generates information about the depth of the scene in real time codifying the distance of every object – warm colours for close objects (reddish and more dangerous) and cold colours for distant objects (bluish and safer).

He added the system also processes real-time movements, indicating the direction in which the object moves in the scene, and how everything changes due to the movement of the car.

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