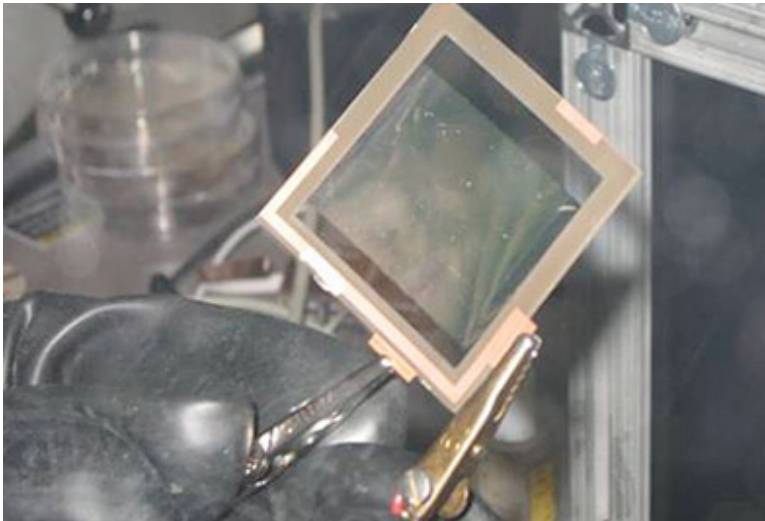# Sending Out an SOS

New Technology Helps Find Disaster Victims

Posted by thegearhunter on Sunday, April 12, 2009 2:21 PM

The recent tragic earthquake in Italy underscores the urgency of quickly finding survivors following a disaster, and rescue workers may soon have a new tool at their disposal. Announced this week as one of the winners of Vodafone's Wireless Innovation Project, Active Networked Tags can pinpoint people trapped in a burning building or buried in debris after a structural collapse caused by an earthquake, terrorist bombing or tornado.

Developed by professors Gil Zussman, Peter Kinget, Ioannis Kymissis, Dan Rubenstein, Xiaodong Wang of Columbia University's Electrical Engineering and Computer Science departments, the Active Network Tags can be embedded in a building as well as attached to people's clothing or even included in cell phones and other wireless mobile devices.

The small tags have ultra-low power capabilities and can also "harvest energy" using light or movement and adapt their communications and networking abilities to optimize energy-usage constraints. In an emergency such as an earthquake in which it may take time to reach survivors, the tags will dial back their energy consumption for long-term and efficient operation.

The Active Network Tags piggyback onto devices that are not typically networked, but in an emergency situation they can switch to a mode in which they form a network and transmit information, such as their last known location to receivers carried by the rescue workers at a disaster site.

Like those stories of how a cell phone saved someone's life, it's another example of tech riding to the rescue.

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