

Robotar to the rescue. . .

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September 13, 2001 JOHN VON RADOWITZ

AN R2D2 look a like robot could soon be going to the aid of road accident victims. The four-foot-tall mechanical dustbin on wheels, called Robotar, is similar to the droid in Star Wars. It is designed to be the first on the scene of a motorway crash, to open a communication link with victims and alert emergency services. A pole-mounted computerised camera system would spot the first signs of trouble, such as a vehicle pulling in to the hard shoulder. If the computer recognises an emergency situation it automatically deploys the droid, which trundles out of a roadside cabinet to investigate. Robotar is equipped with cameras and a video-link, allowing stranded or injured people to talk to emergency services while they wait for human help. Mohan Trivedi, whose team at the University of California, San Diego, designed the robot, said many lives could be saved every year by alerting emergency services earlier. He said: If we can get emergency services to the scene of an incident just five minutes sooner, that translates to 49 lives saved per year on America's freeways. Police chief Alex Jones, of California Highway Patrol, said: The system would certainly give us a leg-up in trying to ascertain the severity of the accident and making sure the right equipment and personnel are sent out.

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