



Publication: **Nelson Mail**

Headline: **New device 'going to save lives'**

Print Run Date: 26/01/2006

Page: 3

Digital Run Date:

Reporter: VASS, Beck

Caption: 124491

Source: The **Nelson Evening Mail**

Keywords: AGED; HEALTH RISKS; TECHNOLOGY-GENERAL; **NELSON-BULLER**

Column:

Special Instructions:

Restrict:

Text: Pendant and watch tracking devices are being fixed to **Nelson** people with Alzheimer's, dementia and autism who go wandering.

Search and Rescue coordinator Sherp Tucker said the devices, known as **Wandatrax**, were a first for New Zealand, and he expected they would eventually be used nationwide.

Murchison resident Ken Simpson helped Waipara man Ian Trethowen develop the **Wandatrax. Nelson** service clubs and charities have funded the first 15 devices, and the first was to be fitted to a **Nelson** patient today.

Another 40 are being made, and more will be produced on demand.

Each **Wandatrax** has its own frequency, which is picked up by a hand-held receiver that beeps louder as it gets closer to the wearer - similar to technology used by hunters searching for lost dogs wearing tracking collars.

Individual signals can be detected within a 1km radius.

Mr Tucker said elderly patients lost in urban areas were often harder to find than people lost in the bush because there were fewer clues to follow.

`` If you can't find these people in the right amount of time, they fall over and die on us because they're frail."

Trials using the **Wandatrax** showed that wearers were usually found in 17 to 25 minutes, he said. It took up to 80 searchers nine hours to find the wearers without the tracking devices.

Mr Tucker said he was expecting a ``trial and error" period where some wearers might take the devices off, but he remained optimistic.

``I've got absolutely no doubt that sitting here is technology that's going to save lives - it's as simple as that."

The idea emerged after talks with a United States expert in tracking elderly wanderers and an Australian man who makes a similar product.

The **Nelson** Host Lions, Red Cross and the **Nelson**-Marlborough Freemasons of New Zealand raised \$15,000 for the first 15 devices and the receiving technology .

``This is the community looking after the community and it's really good to see, " Mr Tucker said. ``I can't thank these people enough."

Mr Tucker said Mr Simpson worked on making the final design ``bombproof".

``He's a very clever man when it comes to small objects like this."

Alzheimer's Society **Nelson** field worker Sue Cochrane said the devices would be vital in reducing the stress experienced by caregivers, as many were elderly husbands or wives who were less mobile than their wandering partners.

``It makes us sleep a little bit better at night.

``It's a bit of a relief really that there's a way to find them a lot quicker."