Louisiana not buying

While a flashlight used to detect drunken drivers has intrigued some Louisiana troopers, the device has not been proven reliable yet, a State Police spokesman said.

The agency has hesitated to invest in the flashlight as have other agencies.

“We’re not considering it at this time because we’re under extreme financial restraints,” said Lt. Mike Roop.

The flashlights cost $600 each.

Sgt. Mike Edmonson said he saw a demonstration of the flashlight during a highway safety conference in Lexington, Ky.

“Of the states in attendance that used it, they used it as a determining factor to decide whether to purchase the unit or not,” Edmonson said.

Roop said the department does not plan to test the new device until it is proven as a reliable technique.

“It’s not proven in court yet,” Roop said.

Lt. A. E. Rodenizer, who headed testing of the sensor conducted by the Charlottesville police, said that the sensor, overall, seemed to have doubled the effectiveness of officers working on drunk-driving roadblocks.

In a telephone interview, Rodenizer predicted that, unless the use of the sensor is successfully challenged in court, the device is reliable enough now to measurably change the character of drunk-driving enforcement.

Charlottesville tested the sensor extensively last year in concert with researchers from the Insurance Institute. For six weeks, at Friday- and Saturday-night roadblocks, officers screened drivers who, if they judged not to have been driving drunk, were then approached by two medical technicians, wearing white laboratory coats to distinguish them from the police.

For three weeks, the test was conducted without the sensor and, for the other three weeks, the gadget was used. To induce cooperation, drivers were found to be under the influence of the technicans by the police were not charged but were instead, offered free transportation home. Almost all of the drivers cooperated. A total of 1,731 cars was checked both by police and the medical technicians.

While Rodenizer had high praise for the sensor, he noted that none of the Virginia cases that resulted in arrest has yet entered court appeals.

The analysis noted, however, that the sensor may only be used as an add-on part of established police procedures, and that the police have some reason to stop a car on the highway, to begin with, or at drunk-driving roadblocks, which have come into increasing use across the country in the last two years.