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Italy designs robots for tunnel fires



Italy has designed robots for fighting fires like the 1999 blaze that killed 39 people trapped in the Mount Blanc tunnel, Italian News Agency ANSA said on Thursday.

The torpedo-shaped devices, unveiled at the European Robotics Conference in Italian southern city Palermo Thursday, shoot high- pressure jets of water at the hottest points in fires, using heat- sensitive cameras to direct their aim.

They will run on rails fitted to tunnel roofs or floors, according to the chairman of the International Society of Robotics and Automation, Bruno Siciliano, a Naples University computerized systems expert.

"The idea of making Robogat came to us right after the Mount Blanc fire," Siciliano said.

Prototypes are being tested at a purpose-built tunnel at Pomigliano d'Arco near Naples, he said.

Italy and Japan are working on new ways of fighting tunnel fires and rescuing people in earthquakes, Siciliano added.

Robot-like firefighting devices were first used in the World Trade Center inferno in September 2001.

Source: Xinhua

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