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House leader concerned by radar guns

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House Majority Leader Sam Smith has "very strong concerns" about the accuracy of the Genesis hand-held radar gun used by state police and the Rendell administration's refusal to acknowledge there might be a problem with it, a Smith spokesman said yesterday.

"I have a feeling the transportation committee may take a look at this," said Steve Miskin, spokesman for Smith, R-Punxsutawney. "Pennsylvanians need to know what the bottom line is. Do these guns work the way they're intended?"

Miskin said Smith also has concerns about a University of Pittsburgh report that the state police says proves the guns are accurate, even though researchers never pointed the gun at a moving vehicle.

"I think any reasonable person would have concerns, not just someone who gets a speeding ticket," Miskin said, adding that Smith intends to talk with state Rep. Richard Allen Geist, R-Blair, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, about holding hearings on the radar gun issue.

Last week, the *Daily News*, citing hundreds of newly released internal state police documents, reported that the state police rejected an offer from Decatur Electronics, the gun's manufacturer, to fix the guns for free. The state police feared the public would challenge speeding tickets, if word got out the guns needed to be fixed, the documents show.

Marlin H. Mickle, who conducted the University of Pittsburgh study, said his report did not prove the gun is accurate. He said the state inspector general's office asked him to find out whether the alternator of the Ford Crown Victorias used by state troopers was causing the gun to give false speed readings.

"We did not address accuracy," Mickle said. "That's where there's a car coming at you and it's traveling 60 mph, but the gun registers 55 mph. We were not asked to look at that. We could not find the alternator caused spurious readings, but that does not say anything about accuracy."

Even that conclusion is controversial because it contradicts findings by state police experts, by Decatur Electronics, by four state-certified radar labs and by an independent Motorola study. After nearly a year of testing, all determined that when the gun was plugged into the cigarette lighter of the cars, the gun often gave phantom speed readings because it is reading the noise from the alternator and not the speed of a moving vehicle.

Mickle said he had been unaware of any other research when he conducted his study last summer and did not know why he reached a different conclusion from other researchers.

"We tried one alternator and a couple of radar guns and could not make it duplicate false readings," he said. "I don't know what tests they did, whether they had a faulty alternator or if we had a faulty alternator."

Jack Lewis, a state police spokesman, and Kate Philips, Gov. Rendell's spokeswoman, declined to comment.