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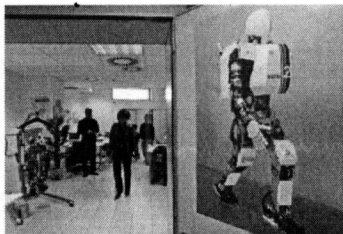
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» 2007-06-26 14:27

INVENTOR UNVEILS ROBOTIC FIREMAN

Robogat to fight tunnel fires



(ANSA) - Naples, June 26 - An Italian inventor has created a robot for fighting fires like the 1999 blaze that killed dozens of people in the Mont Blanc tunnel.

The robotic fireman, dubbed Robogat, is capable of extinguishing fires in motorway and rail tunnels but can also be adapted for use in oil refineries and chemical plants.

Robogat, the result of 2 million euros of privately funded research, was unveiled this week by its inventor Domenico Piatti.

Piatti told reporters that the idea had come to him in the wake of the Mont Blanc tragedy, when a truck fire in the tunnel linking Italy and France led to the deaths of 39 people.

"The aim was to create a robot which could get to places that firemen could never reach," Piatti said.

During simulated tunnel fire experiments, Robogat has successfully put out fires in very little time.

It runs along rails that are specially fitted beneath tunnel roofs and shoots high-pressure jets of water at the hottest points in fires, using heat-sensitive cameras to direct its aim.

The largest version of Robogat can travel at a speed of 80 kph while a smaller model manages 20 kph.

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