



Making Electronic Supervision Work

Technological innovations have changed the way many professions gather, store, understand, and disseminate information. Today, some of these same technologies are being used by correctional agencies to keep a watchful eye on offenders 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Although systems may differ, electronic monitoring is essentially a method of supervising offenders remotely. With an electronic monitoring system in place, probation and parole officers can track offenders whose movements and schedules are restricted (usually by the court) to approved places and activities. In addition to verifying the daily routine of offenders and confirming their adherence to imposed restrictions, some electronic monitoring systems can administer random alcohol and drug tests to check other court-imposed conditions.

Electronic supervision can be flexible and used in many ways, such as to enhance public safety, promote the safety of individual victims, hold offenders accountable, foster behavior change by offenders, reduce jail or prison populations, and provide correctional services economically. But technology is only a tool.

Before implementing electronic supervision, an agency should know that the potential of such technologies is best realized when used to supplement existing programs and that the chosen system must be in harmony with the agency's values, vision, and mission to achieve optimal success. A needs and resource assessment process should look at the entire system to determine how electronic supervision would be most beneficial. Electronic supervision strategies may be appropriate at several points within the criminal and juvenile justice systems and for different classes of offenders. The assessment should also review the available technologies to see which form of electronic supervision might be most beneficial.

Additionally, the legal status of those who may be supervised with electronic technologies must be distinguished to plan appropriate program goals, strategies, and responses to violations. Prior to trial and adjudication, defendants are considered legally innocent, and their rights are protected from the power of the State

even though they may be confined to ensure they appear for trial or to protect the public. Supervision with electronic technology may be substituted for pretrial confinement to achieve these same purposes. After adjudication, electronic supervision may be a useful tool to achieve goals of offender punishment and rehabilitation and public safety.

Further, policies and procedures that protect offenders' due process rights must be in place before persons can be deprived of their freedom. As with other types of technology used in criminal justice cases, the technology must be accurate and meet scientific standards acceptable to courts. Should a revocation be based solely on the technological evidence, the methodology used must have a high degree of accuracy. Because of these issues, it is important that all parties set clear goals for each program.

A number of technologies currently available serve a variety of purposes in offender supervision. These include the following:

- **Automated Reporting Systems** may be most effective with low-risk, low-need offenders to simplify and streamline the supervision process while still holding the

By the end of 2000, 1 out of every 32 adults in this country—3.1 percent of this Nation's adult population—was housed in a correctional facility at a total cost estimated at \$50 billion a year, according to a study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). More than 3.8 million adults were on probation and more than 1.3 million were on parole. The number of probationers and parolees under community supervision reached 4.6 million, an increase of 1.4 million since 1990. Since 1980, BJS reports the incarceration rate has more than tripled. From these statistics two issues become apparent. First is the large—and growing—number of offenders in the community, offenders who possibly could, and frequently do, commit new crimes. Second is the enormous cost of incarcerating almost 6.5 million offenders within the confines of correctional facilities.

offender accountable. Automated reporting can take place through the use of a telephone or a computerized reporting system and is useful in that the offender's identity and location can be recorded at the time of the report. These and other less restrictive supervision techniques can be used to reward offenders who have maintained consistent compliance throughout their period of supervision.

- **Identity Verification Devices** can range from personal identification numbers to biometric verification that recognizes different parts of the human body to ensure the reporting person is the intended offender.
- **Remote Alcohol Detection Devices** operate like a Breathalyzer®. The device—usually in the offender's home—requires the user to blow into the device to measure blood alcohol content. When prompted, users must blow into the device for a long enough period of time to ensure that deep lung air is expelled. The results are recorded by a computer to determine compliance with no-alcohol conditions.
- **Ignition Interlock Devices** are linked to the electrical system of an automobile. This device also operates like a Breathalyzer. The driver must expel deep lung air into the device in order to operate the vehicle. If the driver's blood alcohol content registers above a predetermined level deemed unsafe to operate the vehicle, the vehicle will not start. This type of electronic supervision allows offenders to participate in society while reducing their risk of driving while intoxicated.
- **Programmed Contact Systems** are some of the most widely used types of electronic supervision tools; however, they do not all work alike. Although a wide variety of technologies is involved, programmed contact systems are all used to contact and verify the location of offenders in their homes or other locations. They may be used with offenders who are placed on home monitoring and must stay at home virtually at all times, or they may be used for offenders who are restricted to their homes at various times but can come and go for approved activities. Programmed contact systems are automated calling systems. The backbone of these systems is a central computer that either receives telephone calls from or makes calls to the offender in one or more locations.
- **Continuous Signaling Devices** require the offender to wear a battery-powered transmitting device that emits a radio frequency signal two or more times a minute. The devices are placed on the offender's wrist or ankle with a tamper-resistant strap and must be worn at all times. Manufacturers should incorporate tamper-resistant and alert features in their transmitters. A receiver is installed in the offender's home attached to the telephone. The receiver detects the transmitter's signals and conveys a message via a telephone report

to a central computer either when it stops receiving the radio frequency or when the signal resumes. Receivers can detect transmitter signals from a range of up to, and in some cases exceeding, 150 feet when installed in a typical home environment. Receivers also should have tamper-resistant features to deter offenders from moving or disabling them.

- **Victim Alert/Notification Systems** are most often used for domestic violence victims. This type of system enables victims to know when the offender is approaching their residence. A variation of the continuously signaling devices has been developed for victim alert and notification and offender compliance with stay-away orders. A transmitter is worn by both the offender and the victim and a receiver is placed at both residences. If the offender approaches the victim's home, the system will provide notification of the offender's presence.
- **Field Monitoring Devices**, or "drive-by" units, are another type of continuous signaling technology. Probation or parole officers or other authorities use a portable device that can be hand held or used in a vehicle with a roof-mounted antenna. When within 200 to 800 feet of an offender's ankle or wrist transmitter, the portable device can detect the radio signals of the offender's transmitter.
- **Group Monitoring Units** allow supervisors to monitor several offenders in the same location. This might be appropriate for tasks such as verifying attendance of multiple offenders in a day-reporting program or monitoring offenders confined in a residential group setting. Each offender in a group setting wears a transmitter to allow for electronic supervision by a stationary or portable receiver unit.
- **Location Tracking Systems**, also known as global positioning systems, use 24 satellites orbiting the earth and are among the most complex electronic monitoring systems. The hardware for this system consists of a transmitter worn by the offender, a portable tracking device that the offender must carry or be near at all times, and a charging unit for the portable tracking device that stays in the offender's home. Receivers detect signals from the satellites that include the exact time the signal is sent and the identity of the satellite sending the signal. This information is processed to determine the person's location. This more expensive technology is usually employed with high-risk offenders. It can determine when an offender leaves an area where he should be (inclusion zone) or enters an area where he should not be (exclusion zone).

Although the use of electronic supervision tools is multifaceted and detail oriented, the measure of the effectiveness of the program will take place after implementation. As such, the human element in the implementation of an electronic supervision system should

not be downplayed. The role of technology is to generate information; the decisionmaker is the one who must decide how that information should be used. Sound decisions must be made based on information gathered by these systems. Without sound policy and decisionmaking, information gathered from such systems is of minimal value.

“Electronic monitoring is just a supervision tool and in no way replaces the supervising officer,” says Eric Hanselman of Tracking Systems Corporation. “If an electronic monitoring program does not have clear goals; if the supervising officer’s caseload is too large to permit proper analysis of electronic monitoring data; or if sanctions for noncompliance are not defined, readily available, and implemented when necessary, the success of the electronic monitoring program may be lessened.”

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The issues in this article were discussed by a 21-member working group of criminal justice professionals and are outlined in Offender Supervision With Electronic Technology, a report prepared by the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) under a cooperative agreement funded by the National Institute of Justice. The report discusses assessment, planning, procurement, and technical steps needed to implement an effective electronic supervision program. To obtain a copy of the report, call APPA at 859-244-8207 or download it off the APPA website at <http://www.appa-net.org/embook.pdf>.



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