

Electronic monitoring today essay



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Electronic Monitoring Today

Electronic monitoring has emerged as one of the most popular forms of community corrections in the United States today. Electronic monitoring began and/or was first used in approximately 1984. Today, approximately 12, 000- 15, 000 offenders or participants are being monitored on a daily basis. The electronic monitoring equipment used today allows us to determine if a monitored participant is in his/her required place at the proper time. When I speak of electronic monitoring the first thing that comes to your mind is probably an ankle bracelet. Well, todays technology has called for a few new and interesting not to mention easier forms of monitoring offenders and participants.(It is essential for me to note that not all persons being monitored have been convicted of crimes. Monitoring is also used as a condition of pre-trial release. In my research I will focus on the guidelines of probation monitoring). Today, we have monitors in the form of wristwatches, we also have monitors in the form of voice verification through the offenders telephone, and there is also a system of visual verification that assures that the participant is answering the phone. There are even units that have drive-by options that allow a supervising officer to sit outside of a building and tell whether or not an offender is inside, where he/she is required to be. These forms are in addition to the ankle bracelet. Over the years technology has also been able to enhance battery life and improve the bands worn by offenders by making them non-stretchable and tamper-resistant. A new mobile unit allows supervising officers to check on offenders and hold two-way conversations with them without ever having to leave their vehicles (Papy 132).

In the wristwatch program the participant is signaled through the device at various random times throughout the day. The participant is then obligated to call a central monitoring station from a nearby phone using a 1-800 number. The central monitoring station picks up the participants location using caller ID. The participant is then supposed to press and hold the face of the wristwatch to the phone. The device generates a beeping code, which will identify the participant. The telephone call also is able to detect whether or not the device has been tampered with, and if the participant is in their correct, required locations. The officer programs the number of random signals.

In the voice verification system, the participant is either called at their home at random or they are scheduled to make a call at certain times. However, the system is computerized to pick up the participants voice no matter what type of phone, or what type of condition the phone is in. This system is 95% accurate and can easily tell the difference between relatives. It can also make a positive identification when the participant has a cold.

In connection with the voice verification system there is a visual verification option that allows the officer to make sure that the participant is the person answering the phone.

The supervising officer has three main responsibilities: selecting participants for the program, installing whatever device is necessary for the monitoring program (basically hooking up the offender), and supervising the participants. Officers are contacted each time one of the following key events occurs: unauthorized absences from the residence; failure to return to

the residence from a scheduled absence; late arrivals; early departures from a residence; equipment malfunctions; tampering with the monitoring equipment; loss of electrical power or telephone service; location verification failure (where a participant moves the monitoring equipment from the residence without permission); and when the monitoring equipment misses a randomly scheduled call to the monitoring center (Altman, Murray, Wooten 31). These are all certain violations that set off and can alert the officer of a participant foul up. When the officer is alerted of a violation he/she calls the central monitoring station and finds out who is in violation and does whatever is necessary to handle the problem.

While electronic monitoring is a growing trend in community corrections, two of the major questions are is electronic monitoring cost effective? If so, which system is the best and most secure?

Unfortunately today in our society we have reached some extremely crime-ridden times. Crime rates are soaring, and the corrections system is running out of places and things to do with offenders. Prisons and jails are being overcrowded. The number of people on probation in early 1998 was well over 3.2 million. All of these functions are costing us money. Next to protecting the community, and rehabilitating offenders we also want to find new programs and ideas that will save us money. Also provides us with a significant cost savings for the government. In fiscal year 1996 (according to the Administrative office), if home confinement did not exist, more than 8,000 offenders would have been in prison or halfway houses and more than 5,000 defendants would have been detained in detention centers or halfway houses (Altman, Murray, Wooten 32). One of the main questions asked when

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dealing with community corrections, and the electronic monitoring devices is are they cost effective. Are they saving us money, or losing us money? Well, in 1996, the cost of incarceration was about 42-61 million, depending on the level of incarceration, and the cost of monitoring was 19 million. The total cost of savings in that category was around 23-42 million. On the other side the cost of detention was

2-41 million, depending on the type of detention facility, and the cost of monitoring was around 12 million. The total cost of saving in this particular category was 15-29 million. Now, when asked if electronic monitoring is cost effective the total savings for the year of 1996 was 38-70 million. These figures are all depending on the level of incarceration or the type of detention facility we are dealing with when talking about saving. Different facilities have their own daily rates. (Stats from chart in Altman, Murray, and Wooten 32). By looking at the figures in this chart, it is easy to see that so far electronic monitoring is saving money. Even though these figures are from 1996 the figure amount for savings should be higher today. I say this because; as the number of offenders rises so should the number of those put on the systems. In turn, saving even more dollars.

Now that we have dealt with the problem of cost-effectiveness. What system is the best? The electronic monitoring systems have come a long way since the mid 80s. They have evolved into much more than just the ankle bracelets. Earlier I previously described to you the a few types of monitors. In my opinion the best monitor is not always the cheapest monitor. The best monitor is the one that will keep an offender out of the prison system, and

help to reintegrate an offender back into the community. As well as keep tight surveillance on the offender and assure the community that they are safe. The

monitor that does this the best I feel is the voice verification monitors. Those system functions essentially place calls to pretrial releasees at programmed intervals to remind them or instruct them to do such things as report to the office, attend their next scheduled court appearance, provide a urine specimen, or

whatever other information officers need to convey to defendants. These system functions can also be used to monitor defendants home detention or curfew conditions of release (Cadigan 53). This monitoring system works in one of two ways: the offender either calls the system at specified times, or the system will call the offender at various specified times. Once the offender speaks into the phone the system can pick up the proper voice at a 95% recognition rate. This system is able to differentiate between family members, so that brothers, mothers, fathers, or sisters cannot try to cover for defendants. When this program has been implemented into a home there are certain phone features that must be cut off of the offenders phone. Features such as three way calling, double line, call-forwarding. The offender must show proof of this, by showing his phone bill to the supervising officer every month. This system is purely tamper proof. This is why I feel that it is the best way to go in choosing a monitor.

Not only has electronic monitoring emerged as one of the most popular forms of community corrections today. It is also one of the most cost-

effective programs in community corrections. We have learned about electronic monitoring devices other than the ankle bracelet. We have learned the dollar amount that electronic monitoring is saving our government. I have also discussed with you the device that I feel provides the community with the best

safety assurance, and allows the offender to be treated and reintegrated back into society. Electronic monitoring is a very important part of community corrections today! The more offenders going through the system the monitors we will have being used. Over the years as crime has risen so has the technology of the electronic monitoring device. As crime increases so will the technology for these devices. I feel very confident in the systems we use today, in that they are protecting us (law-abiding citizens) and keeping a close eye on them (criminal offenders).