



CSSD Chronicle



A regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division

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NEW ELECTRONIC MONITORING CENTER NOW IN OPERATION

Electronic tracking technology is a cost-effective monitoring tool for probation and parole clients and is utilized by criminal justice systems nationwide to relieve prison overcrowding, ensure curfew compliance, as a sanction for minor violations, or to enhance the level of supervision of high risk clients—such as sex offenders—within the community. In Connecticut, the CSSD, as well as the Department of Correction, use both radio frequency (RF) and global positioning satellite (GPS) systems to monitor offender curfew and boundary compliance. G4S, a worldwide security company, currently provides installation of equipment and service for over 500 CSSD and 900 DOC clients through its vendor's Connecticut office in Meriden, Connecticut.

TECHNOLOGY BEHIND THE SYSTEMS: The Radio Frequency (RF) system, including the one used by Connecticut, has been an established and reliable technology for many years. It utilizes a two-piece device consisting of a Home Monitoring Unit (HMU) and a bracelet usually worn on the client's ankle. The device recognizes, via radio waves, when it is in range of the HMU and is used to verify that a client has maintained curfew requirements within an established residence or approved location.

The more recent development and civilian use of GPS tracking devices (often used with Connecticut's sex offender clients, whose movements and boundaries are closely monitored for compliance) has also proven to be a very effective resource. Using commercial satellite navigational technology, a client's daily movements within the community are recorded and downloaded at a later time for review of compliance (passive system) or, if appropriate, the tracking software can be programmed to provide continuous tracking and reporting of client movement throughout the day (active system).

CHALLENGES OF GPS TECHNOLOGY: Due to the complexities of GPS technology—its signal strength, geographic interference, and participant compliance—repeated alerts to probation officers and supervisors via text message can occur. Many times, the alert is due to a simple equipment issue—such as a low battery—or, the client has moved to an area of his approved boundaries where there is no cell tower or satellite signal. Over the last few years, as the number of probation clients using GPS monitoring increased, it presented challenges for CSSD officers and their supervisors, especially those officers with specialized sex offender caseloads. An appropriate response to

numerous text alerts beyond traditional work day hours became cumbersome and problematic. There was also an unrealistic expectation of what information the GPS equipment could provide. The Orwellian idea that offenders could be stopped before a violation occurred, by following their every move in “real time,” led to frustration and disappointment when it was discovered the equipment was never intended to operate in that manner.

NEW CENTER ADDRESSES FIELD CONCERNS: Last fall, the CSSD solicited a review of its GPS program from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, that provides training, technical assistance, information services, and policy/program development assistance to federal, state, and local corrections agencies. Based on NIC's October 2008 detailed report and recommendations, CSSD worked with G4S to create a dedicated 24/7 monitoring terminal, located at the security company's California office, to triage Connecticut's GPS alerts and provide officers with more focused and appropriate compliance information. The terminal is staffed by trained technicians who now troubleshoot alerts prior to notifying an officer. In addition, the CSSD's Training Academy will be providing probation staff with more detailed training on GPS monitoring technology that includes guidance on its most effective use with type-specific clients and situations.

An inventory of the monitoring equipment at the Meriden warehouse, and review of field installation procedures, was also done to insure that all RF and GPS units are in top working order. “Devices are not removed from one client and used on another client until they are brought back to Meriden and serviced to make sure there aren't any problems,” said Michael Aiello, Program Manager II of the CSSD's Residential Services.

MEASUREABLE IMPROVEMENT: According to Keith Furniss, Adult CPO I in Waterbury, the G4S monitoring center, which began operation on August 3rd, has brought immediate benefits to the GPS portion of the monitoring program and has reduced the amount of time officers are spending on “false” alerts by 40-50 percent. “There has been a significant decrease in the number of after-hours alerts that I, or my officers, have had to respond to,” said Furniss. “We are very happy with the changes and the increased efficiency of the program.”

For more information on the CSSD's Electronic Monitoring program, please contact Michael Aiello, Program Manager II, Residential Services at Michael.Aiello@jud.ct.gov, or at 860-721-2185.

SUGGESTIONS? QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? CONCERNS? CONTACT US!

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