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Ankle bracelets saving taxpayers big dollars, including in Canyon County

By Mitch Coffman
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SCRAM bracelets take an alcohol reading every 30 minutes

Prison overcrowding is hot topic given a growing inmate population and the high cost of housing inmates during a time of budget issues. California and Washington, for examples, are considering releasing non-violent offenders to lighten the load on their respective prison systems.

While the state of Idaho prisons are not faced with the same degree of prison overpopulation as many other states, there are problems at the local level. For instance, twice the second-largest county in Idaho, Canyon County, has tried to pass a bond for a new jail on the basis that overcrowding is a major problem. Both attempts failed overwhelmingly, forcing the county to now use an exercise area to house inmates.

The old cliché' about necessity being the mother of invention is evident in how Canyon officials are attempting to deal with an increasing prison population and a facility not designed to handle them all, not to mention another important factor – saving tax dollars.

The county is using an ankle bracelet monitoring system to keep tabs on inmates instead of incarcerating them. Ankle bracelet systems allow those who are first-time offenders or non-violent offenders to stay out of jail while still being accounted for by the courts.

The money-saving element is no small factor either. For example, the per day cost for a prisoner at the Canyon County Jail is \$50-\$54. The average cost for an ankle bracelet is around \$10 a day. If a private business, such as a bail bonds company, is in charge of the monitoring, the offender picks up the tab. That is an average savings of \$52 per offender per day in Canyon County.

There are two basic types of ankle bracelet monitoring systems. One is simply a system used to keep track of the offender, like a GPS in an automobile. The second type of system is the SCRAM system, or Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor.

Staci Freeman-Madron, owner of Staci's Bail Bonds in Caldwell, has been providing ankle bracelets and monitoring since 2007. Although Canyon County currently has its own ankle monitoring program, at the time she began offering the bracelets, the county did not have an alternative sentencing program.

"With the overcrowding of the jail, and the lawsuit in Canyon County (about overcrowding), I decided that we needed alternative sentencing ... so I decided to come up with electronic monitoring," said Freeman-Madron.

She has applied that idea to alcohol abuse as well. She also has a SCRAM alcohol bracelet, which she says is new to the area. Freeman-Madron explains, "It's a bracelet you wear around your ankle and it detects the consumption of alcohol. You wear it 24 hours a day and it takes a reading every 30 minutes. It's all transdermal. So if you drink, the alcohol seeps through the pores of your skin and takes a reading. You can't drink any alcohol-related products. No Ny-Quil, anything. No lotions or perfumes, anything with alcohol."

If an offender wants to get rid of the bracelet he or she can simply cut it off. But a warning is sent through a computer system and the bail bondsman is notified. Also, the bracelets must be charged for about two hours a day. The charging process is also monitored through a computer system.

"They're (ankle bracelets) pretty reliable," says Freeman-Madron. "They have to charge them two hours a day but we're monitoring them. All it takes is to plug them into a wall socket. And, if the battery starts to get low we're on it, we're calling them letting them know they need to charge it. That's all a violation, to let it run down."

Throughout the country, ankle monitoring systems are becoming increasingly common. The cost savings is so great, even the city of [Seattle started using ankle bracelet monitoring](#) earlier this year due to continually rising costs of incarcerating offenders, especially those with alcohol-related offenses.

Photo courtesy of dailynews.com

Tags: [Canyon County](#), [Idaho Department of Corrections](#)