

**Lackawanna County, PA**

*DUI Court Progressive in Adoption  
of SCRAM<sup>®</sup> Technology*

**“SCRAM is an external  
force that helps motivate  
internal change within  
our alcohol offenders.”**

*The Honorable  
Judge Michael Barrasso,  
Court of Common Pleas,  
45th Judicial District,  
Lackawanna County, PA*



## The Problem

Lackawanna County – home to the city of Scranton – is located in Northeast Pennsylvania with a population of approximately 210,000. While the County was historically known for its coal mining roots dating back to the 1800's, Lackawanna County is also now recognized for its progressive use of technology within the criminal justice arena.

One such early adoption of new technology was the implementation of SCRAM® (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor) within Lackawanna County's DUI Court. The Honorable Judge Michael Barrasse, who presides over the County's DUI Court within the Court of Common Pleas, made the decision to start using SCRAM shortly after the DUI Court was created in 2003. Prior to SCRAM, Judge Barrasse said he used a combination of house arrest and regular check-ins with breathalyzer tests as an attempt to monitor chronic alcohol offenders – but with limited success. "When we had offenders on house arrest, there was no real way of knowing whether or not they were sitting at home drinking," he says. "We had random call-in periods but didn't have monitoring on the weekends. Offenders were also skating by with being sober at their scheduled appointments, but we knew they were drinking around their breath tests."

## The SCRAM Program

When Judge Barrasse first began using SCRAM in early 2004, the County contracted directly with Alcohol Monitoring Systems (AMS) but soon realized that it needed to quickly expand the number of SCRAM ankle bracelets on hand to accommodate its growing docket of offenders. "After our pilot program, we realized that we needed to expand at a pace that was faster than government bureaucracy would allow," explains Barrasse. The County turned to a private sector provider, MidAtlantic Monitoring Systems, which offered the necessary funding and handles program administration.

In his DUI Court, Judge Barrasse uses SCRAM primarily for pretrial cases. If an offender's BAC is double or more the state limit of 0.08, he or she is automatically placed on SCRAM for at least 90 days. For first-time DUI offenders, Barrasse may employ Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD) in combination with SCRAM and a treatment component. Third-time DUI offenders are ordered to be on SCRAM for at least 90 days, and must also complete 90 days of AA meetings or other treatment programs.

After an offender with a high BAC or repeat offenses completes his or her first 90 days on SCRAM – and is not drinking and is attending regular AA meetings – he or she may be considered for SCRAM house arrest as an alternative to jail. "By the end of the first 90 days, we know if the person is truly staying sober and is really trying to change his or her life – or just doesn't care," says Barrasse. In the SCRAM house arrest program, the offender is given a pre-determined curfew at which time a SCRAM reading is taken by the modem at the house. For example, if the offender should be home at 9:00 pm and there's no reading or the reading is late, he or she gets a warning the first time. If this continues, there are graduated sanctions – such as jail time over the weekend. "Offenders need to realize that this is serious, but there are always those who want to test the system," says Barrasse.

Judge Barrasse explains that there is no standard SCRAM term in his courtroom, but rather he tailors the sentence to the individual. "Some offenders can be on SCRAM for as long as 9 months, but we always start with a minimum of 90 days," he says.

## Technology and Treatment

Barrasse believes that combining SCRAM with treatment is the "best pathway to recovery." He typically mandates daily meetings with AA and its 12-Step Program for the first 90 days. After that, the requirement drops to a few times a week. Combining regular, daily treatment with an around-the-clock drinking deterrent like SCRAM is a huge step towards reducing recidivism, says Barrasse. "SCRAM is an external force that helps motivate internal change within our alcohol offenders," he adds.

Barrasse explains that each offender is given a "report card" that is reviewed on a monthly basis to assess progress and potentially offer rewards for successful program completion. As offenders make measurable gains towards sobriety, they can ultimately look forward to their "graduation day" from the program.

He adds that a number of his DUI Court graduates are now acting as 12-Step sponsors for new offenders just entering the program. By the end of 2006, Lackawanna County had nearly 500 offenders who had graduated from its SCRAM program.

## Program Results

Judge Barrasse says that since SCRAM was implemented, "We're seeing a whole mind shift in a number of areas. Defense attorneys are coming to us and recommending that we put their clients on SCRAM, knowing that this person would have otherwise gone to jail and that SCRAM offers a better way to help them. When we first implemented SCRAM, the DA's were skeptical but now see the benefit of the technology."

Barrasse also adds that, with SCRAM and treatment, he's seeing a large decrease in repeat DUI offenders. "After we've had the SCRAM program for a couple more years, I'm looking forward to having solid data that will show us the long-term effect it has on recidivism."



- Minimum SCRAM monitoring – 90 days
- Average monitoring period – 104 days
- All SCRAM clients also attending AA meetings
- Total SCRAM bracelets owned – 226
- Average number of offenders on SCRAM – 180
- Significant reduction in repeat DUI offenses
- Nearly 500 offenders graduated from the SCRAM program



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