

Marion County, IN

*SCRAM[®] Diverts Alcohol Offenders
from Jail by Increasing Accountability*

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*Brian Barton,
Executive Director,
Marion County Community
Corrections Department*



The Problem

As home to the city of Indianapolis, Marion County is the largest county and population hub in the state of Indiana – with over 863,000 residents within 396 square miles. The City of Indianapolis ranks as the nation’s 12th largest city and is best known as being the “Racing Capitol of the World,” as it hosts the largest global drag racing events including the Indianapolis 500 and the United States Grand Prix.

But a few years ago, Marion County was experiencing problems with drivers of another type. Its number of DUI offenders was growing dramatically and, in 2002-2003, there were over 14,000 DUI arrests and 71 alcohol-related traffic fatalities within the County. Nearly one-third of these arrests were by repeat offenders. At the time, alcohol offenders were primarily monitored by home arrest, probation, or jail sentencing. One thing that became evident for the County as these numbers continued to escalate – none of these methods was working.

Marion County’s Community Corrections Department – established in 1983 by a local ordinance with the directive to relieve prison overcrowding at the state level and enhance local correctional efforts – made the decision to incorporate SCRAM® (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor) into its alcohol program in late 2003. According to Judge William Nelson, who presides over the Marion County Superior Court, Criminal Division, “At the time we implemented SCRAM, drunk driving in Marion County was no longer just a problem. It had reached epidemic proportions, especially with cases involving repeat offenders and those with two or more cases pending at the same time. We saw SCRAM as a highly effective way to monitor these repeat offenders 24x7.”

The SCRAM Program

Marion County began its continuous alcohol monitoring program with the initial lease of 20 SCRAM ankle bracelets. “SCRAM was an innovative technology that supported our agency’s mission,” says Brian Barton, Executive Director for the Marion County Community Corrections Department. “After our initial evaluation, we determined SCRAM would become an integral component of our alcohol program.”

And indeed, it has. From those first 20 bracelets, Marion County’s SCRAM program has grown to a current inventory of nearly 450 units. To date, over 1200 alcohol offenders have been monitored by SCRAM, making the County one of the largest direct agency users of SCRAM in the nation. At any given time, the County typically has 200-300 offenders on SCRAM. Originally used as a continuous monitoring tool for only its “highest risk” cases, SCRAM is now used on first-time as well as repeat offenders – particularly as an alternative to serving jail time.

“The biggest advantage to keeping offenders out of jail is that by staying sober on SCRAM, they have the chance to make lasting and positive changes in their lives,” explains Barton. “Having the offender home – versus being in jail – lets them keep their jobs, support their families, and contribute to the community. If they were in jail, there wouldn’t be the same benefits as we’ve seen with our SCRAM program.”

Sanctions Address Compliance/Non-Compliance

One recent addition to the County’s SCRAM program is its use of sanctions, or graduated measures to reward those offenders who are compliant while punishing those who have confirmed drinking events, tamperings, equipment removals, or communications failures.

Rewards for compliant offenders include verbal and written praise, progress reports sent to the sentencing judge, and a reduction in their daily SCRAM fees. As the offender continues to stay sober throughout his or her monitoring period, the level of rewards increases at 60, 90, and 120-day intervals.

Those offenders who aren’t as stellar are penalized with specific measures taken at first, second, and third offenses. Examples of sanctions for a first offense include increasing the required reporting, restarting the sobriety period, removing any awarded vouchers, filing a written incident report, and evaluating the treatment plan for potential modification. Community service, home detention, intensive treatment, and administrative hearings may be added for multiple offenses.

“There are those offenders who are always going to test the system – but also others who are truly trying to turn their lives around,” says Barton. “Our sanction program addresses both types, and offers a fair and progressive action plan for each. So far, this addition to our SCRAM program has worked very well.”

Program Results

To date, over 1200 alcohol offenders have been monitored by SCRAM in Marion County and the program has been “a huge success,” says Judge Nelson, who explains that each offender is required to handwrite a testimony about his or her SCRAM experience before being released from the program. “I would say that the main message I get in these testimonies is how much SCRAM has helped turned the offender’s life around,” he says. “Many have said that all they need to do is look down at their ankle, and the SCRAM bracelet is a constant reminder that they have a serious drinking problem that they need to address. Or that their child is looking at the SCRAM bracelet, which symbolizes that Dad or Mom is trying to get their life back on track. Many offenders have thanked me for putting them on SCRAM, saying it has really changed their lives.” Nelson adds that he sees very few repeat offenses by those who have successfully completed SCRAM monitoring.



- Approximately 450 SCRAM units in program
- Average monitored days – 126
- Total clients monitored – over 1200
- Focus on jail depopulation at the state level; community corrections at the local level
- Graduated sanctions used for compliance/non-compliance

