

**Montana Department of Corrections (Billings, MT)**

*SCRAM<sup>®</sup> Helps Offenders in Rural Areas  
Transition Back into Society*

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*Mary Aggers,  
DUI Caseload Officer,  
Montana Department  
of Corrections*



## The Problem

National reports routinely list Montana as one of the nation's worst states for drunken-driving rates and fatalities. One reason is the state's vast and predominantly rural nature. While Montana is the 4th largest state for land mass, it ranks only 44th in population size with 944,600 residents – or about 6.5 people/square mile. It also was one of the last states to pass an open container ban, and only recently lowered its BAC requirement for DUI to 0.08.

“In Montana, it's typical for someone to go drinking at a bar in town, then drive an hour or two to get home,” says Mary Aggers, DUI Caseload Officer for the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) in Billings. “Another part of the problem is the mentality here that drinking is a right, which is one reason why Montana lagged in updating our alcohol laws.”

The state's wide-open spaces also caused headaches for Aggers and other parole officers in being able to effectively manage large caseloads of DUI offenders, including chronic repeat offenders who lived far from DOC offices. “These offenders are not your typical ‘Sunday drinkers’ – they are hardcore alcoholics with multiple DUIs,” Aggers adds. “On average, we've had offenders with at least 7 or 8 DUIs under their belts. One individual had more than 30!”

One way that Montana started getting serious with felony DUI (4 or more) offenders was to create a specialized treatment program in 2002. Known as WATCH (Warm Springs Addictions Treatment and Change), it is a partnership between the state and a private, nonprofit corporation called Community, Counseling, and Correctional Services, Inc. Offenders are committed to a secure residential treatment facility – rather than prison – for 13 months of intensive treatment. Those who successfully complete 6 months of the program may serve the remainder of the 13 months, plus another 1-5 years, on probation.

While the program completion success rate was high, the real challenge for offenders came upon release. “In the program, they were under lockdown and undergoing treatment up to 12 hours a day,” Aggers explains. “The problems came when they went back to their old environments with the same drinking triggers. Initially, we were experiencing a low success rate after community re-entry.”

At the time, post-WATCH monitoring was handled by random breath tests based on computer-generated schedules. But because some offenders lived in outlying areas – often more than 50 miles away – these tests were difficult and labor intensive to administer, plus it was easy for offenders to drink around them. “It was very hit or miss,” says Aggers.

## The SCRAM Program

Through a community effort, a more comprehensive supervision strategy was developed that included group reporting, specialized aftercare programs, random regular drug/alcohol testing, and a continuation of the treatment programs conducted at WATCH. In January 2006, the DOC incorporated SCRAM® (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor) into this strategy to provide continuous alcohol monitoring.

SCRAM is mandated for 60 days, but some offenders can be on for 90 days or longer. “Since the first months back into the community are so crucial, we wanted to see if SCRAM would keep offenders from starting drinking again,” says Aggers. In addition to acting as a deterrent, the 24x7 data generated by SCRAM helps parole officers make informed supervision decisions about each offender. Random breath testing is still used for up to a year after the offender is removed from SCRAM.

Alternatives Inc., a private, nonprofit company based in Billings, contracts with the DOC to supply 12 SCRAM bracelets for post-WATCH monitoring and manages the day-to-day SCRAM program responsibilities. “The program has been so successful that we have waiting lists to get clients on SCRAM,” says Yvonne Keller, Community Alternatives Supervisor. “We're looking to expand to keep up with the demand, which is a testimony to how well SCRAM is working.”

## SCRAM Supports Reintegration

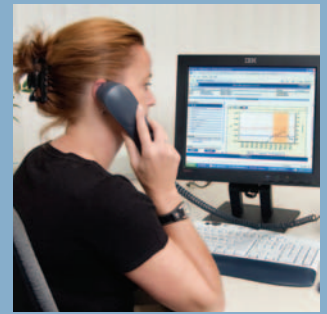
With SCRAM, released offenders can hold jobs and reconnect with their families – without alcohol or their former destructive behaviors. Because SCRAM is automated and requires no work by the offender, they don't have to report for breathalyzer tests and have more time to become productive members of the community.

SCRAM also helps free up time for DOC probation and parole officers. “I've had some offenders on SCRAM who live 60-75 miles away in very rural areas – and I still know what they're doing 24x7,” says Aggers. “It sure beats having to drive out to meet them to administer tests and helps me better manage my caseload, which can be over 100 offenders at a time.” She adds that other state DOC officers are considering SCRAM, in conjunction with a direct intensive supervision treatment plan, for similar offender management programs.

## Program Results

While it is still early to conclusively determine if SCRAM has helped the success of the WATCH reintegration program, there is promising evidence that it is playing a huge role in improving outcomes. Aggers describes the SCRAM program's success rate as “very high.” Of the more than 120 offenders who have been monitored by SCRAM, only a handful drank while on the bracelet and 86% did not return to drinking after leaving the program. That's a marked improvement over the regional success rate for WATCH graduates in general, and demonstrates that continuous alcohol monitoring during the first months after release can help make an appreciable difference.

“SCRAM has helped us do a better job monitoring offenders, as well as helped the offenders be more successful in their lives,” says Pam Bunke, Administrator of the department's Adult Community Corrections Division. Aggers agrees, “SCRAM has been tremendously beneficial for us. I don't know how we did it before.”



- SCRAM used for first 60-90 days after offender released from WATCH program
- Average monitoring period – 61 days
- No direct financial cost to the offender
- 94% of offenders on SCRAM compliant during monitoring
- 86% of offenders remained compliant after removed from SCRAM

