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REGIONAL: DA urging use of alcohol monitoring device

By JOHN HALL - Staff Writer

RIVERSIDE ---- Sheila Keslow knows she has a problem with alcohol. The Murrieta woman has multiple drunken driving convictions to prove it.

When she pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor DUI in January, Keslow agreed to participate in a monitoring program that she says has changed her life and will literally save the lives of others.

As part of her criminal sentence, Keslow has for the last six months been wearing an ankle bracelet that provides 24-hour-per-day monitoring of alcohol concentration through the skin.

"This is a constant reminder to me not to drink," Keslow, 48, said at a news conference Wednesday.

"I haven't been drinking," she said. "I don't know if I would (not) be (drinking) if I wasn't wearing it."

Now, in what authorities are calling a first in California, people sentenced to felony drunken driving could be ordered by Riverside County courts to wear the monitoring device for 120 days as a term of their probation.

Riverside County District Attorney Rod Pacheco said Wednesday he will be strongly urging courts to impose the use of the device. Pacheco called its use a mix of rehabilitation and punishment.

And, he adds, it costs taxpayers nothing.

The offender pays for the program which runs an average of \$15 a day, said Linda Connelly, president of Leaders in Community Alternatives, which has been contracted to manage the device's use in Riverside County.

Offenders will be allotted the chance to pay for it on a sliding scale of between \$5 and \$50 based on their income, she said.

The Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor bracelet takes a reading from its wearer every 30 minutes, storing data in a SCRAM modem in the person's home, which then transmits that data to a secure Web site for processing.

If the wearer has consumed enough alcohol to register more than 0.02 percent blood-alcohol content or has tried to tamper with or remove the bracelet, those monitoring the Web site will know, officials say.

Leaders in Community Alternatives will be working closely with the county's Probation Department to make sure those wearing the bracelet stay in compliance.

"We have a responsibility to enforce court orders," Riverside County Chief Probation Officer Alan Crogan said Wednesday.

Since the program was instituted May 1, there are five misdemeanor DUI offenders being monitored nonstop by the device.

"We want to get them vested into changing their behavior," Crogan said, stressing that the use of the bracelet will not be in lieu of jail time if that is needed.

Pacheco said there were about 60,000 felony and misdemeanor DUI cases in Riverside County last year. He said his prosecutors will be advocating the use of the SCRAM bracelet during sentencings in DUI cases.

"Hopefully, this will become part of the regular sentencing in Riverside County," Pacheco said.

Chris Stites of Alcohol Monitoring Systems, which manufactures the SCRAM system, said Riverside County's use "stands to be one of the largest such programs in the United States."

The program was first proposed to the county Board of Supervisors in a resolution by 3rd District Supervisor Jeff Stone.

"This is our best effort to protect the public," Stone said. "My hope is that this will save lives."

Contact staff writer John Hall at (951) 676-4315, Ext. 2628, or jhall@californian.com.