



Riverside County plans to monitor high-risk DUI offenders for alcohol use

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By **JOSE ARBALLO JR.**
The Press-Enterprise

When Sheila Keslow was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol in January, the Murrieta resident was given the option of taking part in a new program that tracks alcohol consumption through an ankle bracelet.

Keslow jumped at the chance, and she has been sober since.

She is one of five misdemeanor DUI offenders taking part in a new system for those given probation as part of their sentence. It is a program Riverside County officials hope will cut down on alcohol-related accidents and be made a standard part of sentencing for felony DUI cases -- a first for California courts.

Story continues below



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Sheila Keslow, of Murrieta, wears a device on her ankle that tracks alcohol consumption. Keslow says she has been sober since agreeing to take part in the program.

"It really has helped me," said Keslow, 48, as she sat before reporters and news cameras Wednesday in Riverside. Seated alongside Keslow were, among other Riverside County officials, District Attorney Rod Pacheco and 3rd

District Supervisor Jeff Stone. "I don't know if I would be drinking without it, but it is a constant reminder that I should not. If I can use it, anyone can."

The Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor (SCRAM) system has been used throughout the country and by courts -- both criminal and civil -- in San Bernardino, San Diego and Orange counties, said Chris Stites, director of sales for Denver-based Alcohol Monitoring Systems Inc., which manufactures the devices.

The program will be administered by Leaders in Community Alternatives, a San Francisco-based company that will report to the Riverside County Probation Department.

In announcing the program, Pacheco said he hopes the system will keep defendants -- from first-time offenders to repeat drunken drivers -- from drinking alcohol in violation of their probation, because it continuously monitors the user. He would like courts to order offenders to be hooked up to the monitors for 120 days as a term of probation. Defendants who violate probation risk further punishment, including additional time in county jail or state prison.

The 8-ounce bracelet can detect alcohol consumption through perspiration. It sends the information to a modem, which then is forwarded to a collection system every 30 minutes. The system works 24 hours a day.

The device can detect a blood-alcohol level of about .02, which is equivalent to about two beers. Under state law, a driver is considered under the influence of alcohol at .08. The device can also tell whether someone tries to remove it or block the connection to the skin, such as by placing something between the ankle and the device.

Linda Connelly, president and chief executive officer of Leaders in Community Alternatives, said 85 percent of people using the system do not drink alcohol. The device on its own does not prevent alcohol consumption, she said, but is simply a tool for authorities and the client.

The cost of the program is paid by the defendants. On average, it's about \$15 a day, but can run from \$5 to \$50 a day, depending on the offender's ability to pay. No public funds are used for the program, she said.

Keslow said she could not stand having the device when she started, but has gotten used to it. Because it is always there, Keslow said, it is a constant reminder not to drink. She hopes others will be encouraged to use it, particularly young offenders.

"It can save lives," she said. "It is worth a try."

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