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Achilles' heel of offenders praised **Anklets can detect alcohol via sweat**

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By Michelle Hunter
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Alcohol-monitoring ankle bracelets have come a long way since their debut, from scourge of the repeat drunken-driving offender to the surprising "it" accessory among Hollywood's young, famous and inebriated.

Despite the dubious fad status earned via celebrities like Lindsay Lohan and Michelle Rodriguez, New Orleans area judges and court officials still applaud the devices that they began using in 2005.

"I think it's a really useful tool," said Judge Stephen Grefer of Jefferson Parish's 2nd Parish Court in Gretna. "We're always looking for ways to impose rules on people who don't follow the rules."

Similar in appearance to the electronic monitoring devices often used in home incarceration programs, Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor bracelets sample the wearer's perspiration for alcohol every 30 minutes, said Matthew Mitchell, a regional manager for manufacturer Alcohol Monitoring Systems Inc. The bracelet includes infrared and temperature sensors that detect attempts to fool it, such as covering the ankle with bologna or plastic.

The information is stored until it can be downloaded by a wireless modem, usually installed at the offender's home. Then it's transmitted to Alcohol Monitoring Systems' headquarters in Littleton, Colo., where an analyst determines whether someone's been sipping a little something more potent than water.

The I CAN drug program in 24th Judicial District Court in Gretna began using the bracelets in 2005. They also are used for offenders in Jefferson's 1st and 2nd Parish courts, New Orleans Traffic and Municipal courts, and 22nd Judicial District Court in Covington, said owner Lenny Levenson of EtOH Monitoring, which distributes the bracelets. EtOH is monitoring about 65 people, he said.

Each court uses different guidelines for ordering the bracelet's use. In 1st Parish Court in Metairie, convicted DWI offenders are evaluated by licensed clinical substance abuse counselors who can recommend monitoring, court administrator Beatrice Parisi said. In 2nd Parish Court, Grefer said he decides on monitoring and reserves it for only a handful of cases, usually the most serious of his second-offense DWI defendants. For example, Grefer ordered monitoring for a defendant who was already using a vehicle ignition lock Breathalyzer, after data showed the man tried to start his car after having a few drinks.

"The mere fact that you're a second-offense DUI and you're still trying to get behind the wheel of a car while you have alcohol in your system is a real concern for me," Grefer said.

Offenders pay \$12 per day for the monitoring. Despite that amount, Levenson said the

device can save some money for some.

"These people are paying a lot more than that to get their blood alcohol over the legal limit," he said.

Grefer said relatives of one offender in his court expressed their appreciation for the bracelet, telling him that it prompted the defendant to quit drinking.

"It's very rare to get a thank-you call from a family for ordering an additional condition of probation," Grefer said.

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