



Court-ordered bracelet keeps offenders off the bottle

BY BILL DOLAN

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CROWN POINT | Several Lake and Porter County alcohol offenders are on the molecular abstinence program: If they take a sip, their sweat molecules squeal on them to the courts.

"I'm sure it has saved lives," Porter Superior Judge David Chidester said Tuesday. His court has been using the SCRAM (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor) system for a year.

Chidester has six offenders wearing the SCRAM ankle bracelets, which test their sweat every 30 minutes for alcohol content and electronically alert courts of any noncompliance.

Chidester said he would like to upgrade the program to include an ignition interlock, which would prevent the monitored offenders from using their vehicles after drinking.

Porter County Judge Julia Jent and Lake Superior Court Judge Julie Cantrell have had offenders in their courts using SCRAM bracelets, too, said Kathleen Brown, a spokeswoman for Total Court Services.

"I'm willing to give it a whirl," Cantrell said. "We have five people on the program currently, but it's too early to say whether it will be a long-term success."

Total Court Services, a privately held company headquartered in suburban Detroit, has been selling the SCRAM program to courts throughout the state. Brown said the device has been used to monitor more than 2,900 offenders statewide.

In Lake and Porter counties, a combined 28 offenders have been ordered to use SCRAM.

Chidester said the devices beam a report to a modem that transmits the data via satellite to his court staff.

"For many it works just by serving as a constant reminder," Chidester said.

However, it didn't for one woman in his court.

"I have a girl who is now in her fourth month of imprisonment. She not only took a drink, she also tried to cut the monitor off with scissors," Chidester said.

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