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Kane sees success from monitoring alcohol detecting device

Kane sees success, savings from offering devices that monitor a defendant's sweat for alcohol

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More than 18 months after Kane County judges began offering continuous alcohol monitoring as an alternative to jail, the prosecutor's office is hailing the program as a success and a savings to taxpayers.

In April 2007, the Kane County state's attorney's office began offering SCRAM — Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor — as a way for defendants to avoid jail time.

The SCRAM device has two black boxes, slightly smaller than a man's wallet, which are strapped to both sides of a defendant's calf. The monitor takes hourly readings by measuring the alcohol content in a person's sweat. Prosecutors prefer it to a breath test, which does not provide immediate feedback and cannot measure how long someone has been drinking.

Twelve Kane County judges have sentenced offenders to wear the device, while other people awaiting trial have been allowed to wear the SCRAM device as part of bond conditions. Offenders pay between \$6 and \$15 each day to wear the device.

Prosecutors say if those people had been in jail, it would have cost \$3.2 million to house them. Not all of the people on SCRAM would have necessarily been sent to jail, so the savings are a rough estimate.

But in less than two years, approximately 430 defendants have worn the device for a cumulative total of 44,097 days, according to Kane prosecutors. The average Kane defendant spends 108 days on SCRAM.

And 90 percent of those defendants have used the program successfully, not drinking alcohol or tampering. One person — unsuccessfully — tried to slip lunch meat into the device, Kane County State's Attorney John Barsanti said.

Two years ago, Barsanti was most concerned whether judges would see the technology as a reliable and viable option.

"To me, all along, the question was the credibility this would build up with the judiciary," he said. "My interpretation is that the judges think this has been reliable and professionally run."

At this point, Barsanti said his office doesn't plan to tweak the program.

"The savings to taxpayers is just one of the benefits to SCRAM," he said. "It also helps us in the war against drunken driving, and it helps defendants understand that they must be held accountable."

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