



Electronic Home Monitoring

2.5.13

What is Electronic Home Monitoring (EHM)? EHM is a program implemented as an alternative to incarceration, both as a pre-trial release option and as an out-of-custody sentencing option. Instead of being housed in jail, offenders are restricted to their homes and are allowed to leave only for work and medical or legal appointments. Offenders are monitored electronically with specialized equipment that alerts a probation officer immediately if the offender strays from their pre-arranged schedule, or if they consume alcohol (transdermal sensors detect alcohol). Random drug tests are often a condition of EHM programs as well.

What are Spokane City and County Doing Now? In the City of Spokane, the Municipal Probation Department has two full time probation officers assigned to EHM. Together, they can monitor 60 offenders at one time. About half of the EHM participants are serving 30-90 day sentences for gross misdemeanors. The other half are on pre-trial supervision. The City rents its EHM equipment from the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police, but City Probation Officers perform the monitoring. Offenders check in with their probation officer weekly to review schedules and to pay a fee, which ranges from \$1 to \$12 per day, depending on financial circumstances.

The Spokane County Probation Department has no EHM program. If an offender wants to be on EHM either for pre-trial release or as an alternative to a jail sentence, he or she must convince the Court to approve EHM and then must contract with a private EHM company. Private EHM costs a participant approximately \$15 per day and often includes an installation fee of about \$50.

Concerns about using private companies for EHM monitoring, as opposed to County/City probation, include: 1) Varying quality of employees and supervision; 2) Lack of access to law enforcement; 3) Delay between violations and a probation officers' awareness of violations; and 4) Expense to participants – the 'for profit' model limits access to the program. Spokane County Consultant David Bennett recommends that EHM programs be public rather than private. David Bennett and Donna Lattin, "Spokane County Corrections Needs Assessment Master Plan Draft," February 14, 2008, Chap. 4, p. 52

How can Spokane City and County Improve?

City of Spokane: Additional probation officers assigned to EHM, and continued referrals from Municipal Court judges. According to Chief Probation Officer, Donna McBride, the demand for EHM in the Municipal Court system could easily support 6-8 full time officers. Currently, offenders often must wait weeks to get set up on EHM - This time is either spent in jail (at a cost of about \$120 per day to the City) or on un-monitored monetary release (thereby increasing likelihood of drug and alcohol use, new charges, and missed court hearings).

Spokane County: An internal, County EHM program (County Probation Officers monitor participants), and increased referrals to EHM by judges.

How will Spokane City and County Benefit by Implementing these Changes?

- Cost Savings: EHM is significantly cheaper than housing an offender in jail. The Municipal Probation Department estimates that the City spends an average of \$10 per day per offender for EHM, as opposed to about \$120 per day per offender in jail. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that an EHM program will save a jurisdiction \$19,812 per participant (in 2011 dollars).
- Reserve Jail beds for High Risk Offenders: Placing low-risk offenders on EHM opens up jail beds for high-risk offenders who may actually pose a threat to the community's safety. Currently, the jail manages its population through reactionary charge exclusion, a policy whereby people with certain charges are either not booked or are booked and immediately released on their own recognizance when the jail is too full. An expanded EHM program would provide a reasoned, safe way to reduce jail population.
- Avoid the Disruption Caused by Jail to Employment, School, Housing, Medical Care, and Family Responsibilities: When people go to jail, jobs are lost, bills go unpaid, financial aid for school is terminated, evictions are served, and children and spouses lose a vital member of the family unit. EHM prevents these counter-productive, often irreversible disruptions in an offender's life while still providing a strict sanction for unlawful behavior.
- Reduce Recidivism: The Municipal Probation Department estimates that since the City's EHM program started a little over 2 years ago, only 5 people have been charged with new crimes while on EHM (1% of all participants), and violations such as missed payments or curfew violations are very rare. EHM, unlike jail, teaches offenders how to function in the real world without substance abuse and crime; it breaks unhealthy cycles and establishes new routines. At the end of an EHM sentence, an offender has a productive routine in place that he or she can continue to follow. At the end of a jail sentence, conversely, offenders often find themselves homeless, unemployed, drowning in newly accrued debt, and forced to re-apply for financial aid and other assistance.

Personal Story: "Kristy," 36, has struggled with alcohol and substance abuse since she was 13, and has cycled in and out of the jail for addiction-related offenses. With EHM and the support of City probation officer she has gotten serious about recovery.

"[My probation officer] gives me like one or two minutes if I'm late to something. I work, pick up my kids, and then go to treatment and AA meetings. It's a scary day when the bracelet comes off. I see it as added protection. I believe in EHM totally."

“If I had been in jail it would have been horrible; I wouldn’t have had a job, I wouldn’t have been able to take care of my family expenses. When you’re in jail, you are nothing. Your self-esteem goes down and you become angry, frustrated, and you just say ‘screw it.’ Mothers and dads are in the jail – Yes, we screwed up but we’re trying to get better.”

Sources of Information:

David Bennett and Donna Lattin, "Spokane County Corrections Needs Assessment Master Plan Draft," February 14, 2008, Chap. 4, p. 52,
[http://www.spokanecounty.org/data/countysheriff/jep/Needs%20Assessment%20\(5Mb\).pdf](http://www.spokanecounty.org/data/countysheriff/jep/Needs%20Assessment%20(5Mb).pdf)

David R. Thompson, Ph.D., "Results from the Discovery Analysis and Resolution (DAR) Process, A Compilation of Ideas Collected and Derived From Discussions with Spokane County Elected Officials and Professional Staff, Focused on Spokane County's Legal-Justice System, Version: 5 October 2009," prepared for Spokane County Board of County Commissioners, p. 27.

Washington State Institute of Public Policy - Return on Investment: Evidence-Based Options to Improve Statewide Outcomes, April 2012 Update, 2012 April, Stephanie Lee, Steve Aos, Elizabeth Drake, Annie Pennucci, Marna Miller, Laurie Anderson. #12-04-1201, p. 4.
<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=12-04-1201> (9.2.12).

Compiled by:

Mary Lou Johnson, Attorney & Julie Schaffer, Attorney for Center for Justice

For more information on the Smart Justice Campaign go to www.smartjusticespokane.org or contact:

Greater Spokane Progress, Anne Martin, Director, (509) 624-5657, anne@spokaneprogess.org
Center for Justice, Julie Schaffer, Attorney, (509) 835-5211, jschaffer@cforjustice.org