

Alcohol-sensing ankle monitors the latest tool against repeat DUI incidents in Lake County

By Jim Newton - Contact Reporter

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Repeat DUI offenders make up roughly one-third of Lake County's impaired driving arrests and court cases, according to the Lake County State's Attorney's Office, which has gone high-tech to address the issue.

The State's Attorney's Office has launched a program to monitor repeat DUI offenders out on bond with alcohol-sensing ankle monitors that will measure their sobriety 24 hours a day.

"When we separate these offenders from alcohol, we know they aren't going to be out drinking and driving, or committing other alcohol-involved crimes," State's Attorney Michael Nerheim said in announcing the new program. "We are targeting the root cause of these problems, saving taxpayers' money and giving these offenders the chance to get sober and get their lives back on track."

Known as SCRAM Continuous Alcohol Monitoring, the anklets automatically test the wearer's perspiration every 30 minutes for alcohol consumption. The technology has been used to monitor 620,000 high-risk DUI offenders around the country and more than 12,500 people in Illinois, according to authorities.

"Alcohol monitoring, especially when it's part of a larger program of supervision and treatment, can support long-term behavior change, making it less likely these individuals will be back here for another offense in the future," Nerheim said.

According to the State's Attorney's Office, based on statistics through 2016, Lake County has the fourth-highest rate of drunk driving arrest rate in Illinois, and those who repeatedly drive drunk account for up to a third of those arrests. They are also more likely to cause serious crashes, officials said.

Under the new program, repeat, high-risk offenders may, as a condition of bond, be required to stay sober and wear a SCRAM anklet that constantly monitors the presence of alcohol.

Post-conviction, offenders can be sentenced to be monitored for sobriety for up to 180 days using the anklets. The program is also set up to address other offenses, like domestic violence and assault, where alcohol played a contributing role, Nerheim said.

Officials said the goal of the program is to reduce the number of offenders who are putting the community at risk by committing alcohol-involved crimes.

Offenders will be responsible for the cost of their monitoring, which allows them to maintain their employment and family commitments while ensuring they aren't drinking and endangering the public,

Nerheim said.

Nerheim said the program began with some test cases earlier this year and now is fully up and running.

The county's new ankle monitoring equipment is designed by Colorado-based SCRAM Systems, the leading provider of alcohol testing technologies for the criminal justice industry.

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