



# Case Study

## California DUI Court Uses Technology to Lower Repeat Drunk Driving

### HIGHLIGHTS OF SUCCESS

- The SJDMC has reduced annual DUI arrests by 66% since the start of the program.
- Since 2012, alcohol-involved collisions in the county have dropped 46%.
- The success of the SJDMC has inspired several courts around the country to pursue their own track-based alcohol and drug monitoring program.

### LOCATION

San Joaquin County, California

### CATEGORIES

DUI/DWI  
Probation

### MONITORING SOLUTIONS



SCRAM Continuous Alcohol Monitoring®



SCRAM Remote Breath®

### Overview

Located just east of the San Francisco Bay area in California's Central Valley, San Joaquin County has approximately 726,000 residents. The area is known as one of the most agriculturally rich areas in California and produces a wide variety of crops, from asparagus to wine grapes.

Alcohol-involved crashes and drunk driving have long been issues in the county. Prior to 2008, repeat DUI offenders were placed on probation with little follow-up or accountability for completing the requirements of their probation. As a result, San Joaquin had one of the highest rates of DUI recidivism in the state.

San Joaquin launched its DUI court—known as the San Joaquin DUI Monitoring Court or SJDMC—in 2008 with initial grant funding from the California Office of Traffic Safety and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

All individuals convicted of a second or subsequent DUI in the county are required to participate in the SJDMC. At any given time, the program has approximately 500 active participants, and they may only exit the program upon successful completion of all requirements. Any active participant who becomes incarcerated for a new DUI offense will eventually end up back in the program and is required to start from the

beginning. To date, over 3,600 participants have completed the program.

The SJDMC assigns offenders to one of two distinct tracks based on the DUI-RANT™ Assessment:

#### Track 1 (Accountability Track)

The majority of participants enter the program in the Accountability Track and are subject to alcohol monitoring and/or drug testing depending on the substance involved in their arrest. These offenders must appear in court at one month, six months, and one year following their enrollment in the program. Clients who are compliant with their requirements—including monitoring, impaired driver education, and court hearings—can finish the program in 12 months.

#### Track 2 (Treatment Track)

Participants who repeatedly fail alcohol or drug testing, who are not compliant with court orders, or who are assessed as alcohol or drug dependent can be placed in the court's Treatment Track. These participants are often referred for intensive in-patient or out-patient treatment and generally must submit to more rigorous forms of alcohol or drug monitoring. They must also appear in court more frequently, starting at once a week for newer participants and scaling back to once a month for participants who have demonstrated extended compliance.



## How is Alcohol Monitoring Used

All alcohol-involved SJDMC participants are placed on alcohol monitoring, and the court uses a variety of monitoring technologies to supervise its diverse participant population. Individuals in Track 1, who are generally “low-need” participants, are supervised with ignition interlock devices to ensure public safety. Portable breath testing or SCRAM Continuous Alcohol Monitoring® (SCRAM CAM®) is assigned to Track 1 participants who do not have a car to ensure they cannot circumvent the court’s universal monitoring requirement.

Track 2 participants are required to submit to more intensive monitoring, such as frequent SCRAM Remote Breath® testing or SCRAM CAM. The intensive monitoring supports the outcomes of other services, including treatment and support groups like AA.

Judge Richard Vlavianos has led the SJDMC since its inception. He notes that in addition to being a method of supervision, alcohol monitoring data is an important diagnostic tool for assessing participants’ needs over time. The data helps the court identify participants who are struggling or who require further assessment for alcohol dependence or addiction. Track 1 clients who test positive for alcohol consumption can be stepped-up to Track 2 so that they can receive additional services and supervision. Similarly, participants are incentivized by the opportunity to step down from Track 2 to Track 1 if they demonstrate positive progress and compliance.

In general, clients pay all fees associated with their monitoring. However, the court does have grant funding available to assist indigent clients with the costs of monitoring.

## Independent Research

One factor that has contributed to the court’s success is its commitment to continuously improve the program based on data and outcomes. Several research entities have analyzed the court’s efficacy and provided recommendations the SJDMC uses to further improve the program.

For example, in 2012, the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) conducted a qualitative study to address more effective interventions tailored to female drunk drivers, who account for nearly 20% of all DUI arrests. Through focus groups, TIRF



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found that female participants were more forthcoming and willing to discuss trauma or other factors that may contribute to their alcohol use when placed in single gender settings. They also found that female participants tend to be more responsive to treatment than their male counterparts. Based on these findings, the SJDMC has since divided Track 2 into gender-specific groups and has seen outcomes improve for female participants.

That same year the court was also evaluated by NPC Research, an independent research firm that has conducted over 125 evaluations of drug courts around the country. NPC was tasked with determining how effective the court’s efforts were in reducing DUI recidivism and alcohol-involved crashes in the county and found that the SJDMC participants:

- Were far less likely to be re-convicted of a new drunk driving offense. Individuals under traditional probation were reconvicted for a new drunk driving offense 32% more often than SJDMC participants.
- Had 50% fewer substance-involved accidents than individuals on traditional probation, and fewer overall accidents and accidents with injuries even when alcohol or drugs were not involved.
- Were more likely to comply with their court requirements than the comparison group.

## Outcomes

Since the program’s inception 10 years ago, annual DUI arrests in San Joaquin County have decreased by two-thirds, down from 3,300 arrests in 2008 to 1,111

arrests in 2016. Additionally, alcohol-involved collisions have dropped 46% since 2012, with resulting deaths and injuries down 36%.

One of the main goals of the SJDMC is to reduce DUI recidivism in the county. At its highest point, the SJDMC had nearly 1,000 active program participants at any given time, but since 2012, the average number of offenders in the program has decreased by nearly 19%, demonstrating the program’s efficacy as fewer participants go on to reoffend.

“This is what we are trying to do,” says Judge Vlavianos. “We are having a hard time finding repeat offenders to put up front and use as an example. The trend is pretty dramatic.”

San Joaquin County law enforcement is also embracing the program and working closely with the SJDMC as they experience the positive impact it is having on the community.

Requiring all repeat offenders to be supervised by the court and undergo alcohol monitoring isn’t the norm, but Judge Vlavianos thinks it should be. “Supervising only 15% or 20% of repeat DUI offenders doesn’t sufficiently improve public safety in my opinion,” he notes. “You have to supervise all of them. You wouldn’t run a drug court without testing the clients. Why should alcohol offenders be any different when it comes to monitoring? Every DUI/DWI court should be using monitoring technology.”

The program’s success over the past decade has inspired several courts in California, Texas, and Utah to pursue funding to implement their own DUI Monitoring Courts using a track system.