

The County Press

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Community Corrections gets nod to purchase ankle monitors

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LAPEER — After a year of leasing electronic monitoring equipment in the hopes of deterring people from repeat offenses, the program has gone so well that Community Corrections is taking the leap to purchase equipment outright to continue the service.

Last March, Community Corrections leased GPS ankle units and Continuous Alcohol Monitoring (CAM) ankle units from SCRAM Systems as a means to help people remain compliant, whether while awaiting their day in court or as part of their sentencing. Coordinator David Stevens said the program has proven beneficial.

The CAM unit is a breathalyzer that gets strapped to the ankle, and it administers 48 tests a day — one every 30 minutes — based on the insensible perspiration of ethanol vapors through the skin. The continuous nature of the testing means people cannot beat the test like many do when they have to go in for a standard breath test. Thanks to years of research, dozens of independent studies and a number of court cases, the CAM readings have been determined to have a miniscule margin of error and are admissible in court. The bracelets have been found to provide an incentive for many wearers, and if they find that a wearer is still drinking, they know some deeper substance abuse help is needed.

The CAM bracelets also have a house arrest feature that sets a boundary for the wearer. For higher-risk offenders, the GPS bracelet will drop a pin every minute indicating the wearer's location, and it can be programmed to allow for home, workplace, and a specific route to and from work, for example. The location reports are then consolidated, and any out-of-boundary marks are noted. A vibration or an audible tone can be sent to the unit remotely to warn the wearer.

The monitoring fee that is charged whenever one of the units are used must be paid up-front by the offender who will be wearing it. According to SCRAM Systems, the units will usually pay for themselves within about two years, so purchasing them — despite the fact that upgrades will inevitably be needed as technology changes and improves — leads to savings. There will also no longer be a rental fee for the equipment.

For those reasons, the Lapeer County Board of Commissioners gave Stevens the green light on Thursday to purchase 10 CAM bracelet kits, 10 of the base units, and 10 GPS bracelets at a total cost of \$22,978.30.

In the year since they started the program, Community Corrections has used the devices for 162 clients. Currently, there are eight being monitored via GPS, 13 undergoing alcohol monitoring and six on house arrest.