

**PRINTER FRIENDLY**[\[Print\]](#) [\[Close\]](#)**Ankle monitors detect offenders' alcohol use**By [Heather Ratcliffe](#)

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People involved in alcohol-related criminal cases may be sweating over the newest monitoring device that judges are strapping to their ankles.

But that's what officials want, since the machine constantly tests its wearer's perspiration for trace levels of alcohol.

Court and probation officials across the St. Louis area are embracing the monitor, known as a SCRAM device, as a way to keep better tabs on people on bond or probation.

"I really find it invaluable," said Jefferson County Associate Circuit Judge Stephan Bouchard. "Most people just don't drink when they are on these monitors because they understand the consequences."

Hollywood has worked the gadgets into television scripts for shows like "CSI" and "30 Rock."

In the real world, judges say, the ethanol-sniffing machine is a hit with offenders who want to get out of jail, and with the public, which won't have to pay for the offenders' incarceration.

"I just see it as having advantages for everyone," Bouchard said. "It's an absolute guarantee of sobriety once you release a person from jail. If they do drink, you're going to know about it immediately."

The Eastern Missouri Alternative Sentencing Services, a private probation monitoring company that goes by EMASS, manages the program here.

"I'm convinced this is going to revolutionize how alcohol offenders are monitored," said Michael Smith, president of EMASS, which is based in St. Charles. "Alcohol is difficult to test for because it metabolizes so quickly. Someone under house arrest could be sitting at home drunk out of his mind, and we'd never know. But this tests every hour."

SCRAM is popping up all over the court system, usually when alcohol is a contributing factor to a crime. The ankle monitor often goes on defendants released on bond awaiting trial, those sentenced to probation, underage drinking offenders or those with multiple drunken driving offenses, Smith said.

Family courts can use them as well, to assess a parent for alcohol problems, Smith said.

St. Louis County's Drug Court has been using the monitor for at least two years, said Kathi Alizadeh, assistant prosecuting attorney.

"We've had occasions in the past when drug court participants have said they are glad to have the bracelet," Alizadeh said. "It helps them resist temptation because they know they will get caught."

In most courts, a positive test means a trip to jail for a few days — or

indefinitely. Other sanctions might include tougher monitoring or mandatory alcohol treatment.

"These people are in the program because they have addiction," Alizadeh said. "We know there are a number of people who are going to have problems and relapse along the way. So we have to handle it on a case-by-case basis."

Twenty counties in Missouri — including St. Louis, Jefferson, Franklin, Warren, St. Charles, Montgomery and St. Louis city — are using SCRAM now with about 250 offenders wearing the device on any day.

In Illinois, seven counties have begun to use SCRAM, with only two jurisdictions in Southern Illinois — Jackson and Williamson counties, in the Murphysboro-Carbondale-Marion area.

Officials from St. Clair and Madison counties have inquired about the devices but have not used them yet, said Kathleen Brown of Alcohol Monitoring Systems in Littleton, Colo., the only company that makes it.

Offenders cannot easily remove the 8-ounce ankle monitor, which is water resistant. It tests every hour, 24 hours a day using "transdermal testing technology" and will trigger an alarm if the wearer tries to tamper with it. Such tampering is a Class B felony in Missouri.

The monitor sends the test results to a modem in the offender's home once a day, usually while he or she is sleeping, Smith said. Then the information is sent to SCRAMnet, a Web-based program that court agents can access at any time.

Courts in every state use SCRAM and have upheld its reliability and accuracy, Brown said.

AMS considers a positive test to be a 0.02, the equivalent of a 180-pound male consuming fewer than two drinks on an empty stomach in less than an hour.

Mike Lowry, a criminal defense attorney in Jefferson County, said he has recommended SCRAM to a number of clients.

"We want our clients to be sober, and we want to be able to show the court they are sober," Lowry said. "If there is a fear that a person is continuing to abuse alcohol, we want to be able to erase that concern."

Lowry said the cost can be an obstacle for some offenders, who are usually required to pay \$10 to \$12 for daily monitoring and a \$50 to \$100 installation fee.

Some worry that the device, like any technology, can experience malfunctions.

Though Lowry has not heard of such a case, he wonders: "It's a machine, and machines make mistakes."

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