

The National Domestic Violence  
**HOTLINE**

## Promoting Active GPS Technology to Protect Victims of Domestic Violence

by Amanda Dyson

Laws for sex offenders to wear global positioning system (GPS) devices vary by state. Some states, such as Missouri, Florida, Oklahoma, and Ohio, require certain sex offenders to wear GPS bands for life. Currently, it is not mandatory for abusers in domestic violence cases to wear a GPS tracking device; people are speaking up about this issue.

In March, Assemblyman Felix Ortiz spoke out for legislation he calls the Erika Bill, which would require any individual with an order of protection issued due to domestic violence to wear an ankle GPS monitoring device. The bill is named after Erika Delia, who was murdered by an ex-boyfriend while a restraining order was in effect. Ortiz made the point that “every 15 seconds an instance of domestic violence occurs.”

Active GPS technology is the safest option for all victims of abuse. Passive GPS tracking devices seem insufficient when compared to newly available active GPS devices that alert domestic abuse victims by call or text if an abuser is in close range.

This May, a sex offender in Northern California, Leonard Scroggins, removed his passive GPS tracking device. Though this technology is used with other crime prevention strategies, Scroggins was still able to make it to San Diego, where he attacked four women within two days. If he were wearing an active GPS that immediately alerted authorities when cut off, time could have been saved and lives protected.

Passive GPS tracking bands require an individual to physically observe a wearer’s activity at intervals while active GPS bands are able to send instant alerts via cell phones if a wearer violates area guidelines. Active GPS technology costs around \$10-\$15 a day. The small devices combine GPS and cellular technologies and do not require proximity to a separate stationary transmission box as other available monitoring systems do. These new devices may also help domestic violence victims to feel more secure that their abuser will not be able to get close without warning. Though some GPS companies advertise active GPS technology and may provide 24 hour monitoring, not all devices are said to provide cell phone alerts.

Active GPS technology has become available for local authorities to implement in cases. Recently, GPS Monitoring Solutions demonstrated its active GPS product in California for court employees, lawyers and victims of domestic violence. Their technology concentrates on victim notification and provides real-time location tracking with the TrackerPal.

A Texas based company, Satellite Tracking of People LLC, provides a BlueTag Active band that transmits data at least once every ten minutes. Attorney General and Minister of Justice Kim Wilson wore an ankle bracelet for one week to test the device and feels that it could serve as an incentive for rehabilitation for offenders and cut down on prison populations in Bermuda.

As GPS devices continue to improve and individuals help to speak out on behalf of domestic violence, technology can be used as a safer and more reliable option to protect victims of abuse.

Last year, Cherry Simpson wrote for the Survivor’s Blog on how GPS tracking kept her daughter safe in an abusive relationship. Read her story at <http://www.ndvh.org/2009/05/gps-tracking/>. This is only one example of how GPS technology has helped in a domestic violence situation, surely there are many more. Victims of domestic violence can seek an order of protection, but a piece of paper is not always enough. Active GPS devices should still be used in combination with other safety measures and victims should remain alert to the reality that the technology is not foolproof.

### Sources:

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