

Sullivan County Sheriff's Office looking into GPS tracking bracelets

By Allie Robinson

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — Tracking technology may soon help keep some Sullivan County inmates out of jail.

The Sullivan County Sheriff's Office is looking into the use of GPS tracking bracelets, which could be worn by low-risk offenders to help reduce overcrowding at the Sullivan County jail, Sheriff Wayne Anderson said Thursday.

He said that with the recent expansion, the jail holds 623 people.

"We've already reached 750, back down to 700, to 680... we're averaging 700 inmates a day," he said of the jail population.

And not all need to be there, he said.

"Say you have a 19-year-old [man] who kinda messed up, and he ends up in jail," he said. "Is that always the best medicine for that person? They learn a lot from inmates... about street life, crimes... that they might not get if they're not locked up, but they need to be punished and follow the rules."

Anderson said the Sheriff's Office started thinking about using tracking bracelets about two years ago, and on Thursday saw a presentation by Jason Gilbert, a regional sales manager at Satellite Tracking of People LLC, which has contracts with several county, state and federal agencies, including the Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole.

The company provides cell-phone sized trackers on bracelets, which can be programmed to monitor offenders by tracking their every move, as well as alerting authorities if the person goes within a predetermined area from which they are excluded — whether that is a local



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER • Jason Gilbert with Satellite Tracking of People, LLC talks Thursday afternoon about GPS-enabled monitoring of probationers and victims of domestic violence and their abusers.

bar or another person.

"You put the rules of the release in the system, it'll let you know when he violates it," Gilbert said, explaining how the tracker device could be used for those who are court-ordered to remain in a certain location.

He demonstrated the use of the system by tracking his own route from Pigeon Forge, Tenn., to Blountville, and showed how the system's monitors could even see that he stopped near a building — a restaurant, to get a meal — and at what speed he traveled.

The company also makes similar devices for victims of domestic violence — a small box someone can clip on



Sullivan County Sheriff's Office looking into GPS tracking bracelets, continued

their belt or put in their bag, which constantly sends signals as to its location. The abuser would wear a bracelet, and authorities would be notified if those two devices got within a certain distance of one another, Gilbert said.

Both the bracelet and the domestic violence system would cost about \$4.75 a day, Gilbert said, which is the rate the state pays for the technology. For an additional dollar or two, the company would monitor the system — something Anderson said could save his office money and time.

“It costs \$42.21 per day to keep an inmate versus \$6.75 a day,” he said. “[If we monitored it] you’d have to hire five people to man it 24/7 because somebody has to be off.”

He said he thinks the technology would be a great help to both the Sheriff’s Office and the offenders who might better benefit from court-ordered monitoring than incarceration.

“You’re not going to have violent people out there,” he said. “If they’re charged with selling cocaine or a drug, I doubt that any judge would order that. It will be a very select few — minor offenses, but they keep doing them over and over.”

He said the offender would pay for the bracelet instead of going to jail, as people do in the day-workers program.

“See, over here we’ve got to provide food, medicine — we don’t have to fund all that if they stay at home,” the sheriff said.

Anderson said there’s no time frame for implementing the technology — first it has to be approved by Sullivan County judges and District Attorney Barry Staubus, who was at the presentation Thursday.



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER • A member of the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office holds a new GPS-tracking monitor Thursday afternoon during a meeting between Satellite Tracking of People, LLC and county law enforcement officials.

“It’s something to think about,” Staubus said of the technology. “If we did something like this we’d need to come up with protocol... and target a select group of people and circumstances.”

Anderson said folks from his office would consult with the state board to see how the technology works there.

But, he said, he thinks it is a good idea.

“You’ve got people, maybe they tripped up, made a mistake, but they’re not violent or evil,” he said. “It kind of helps them.”

