



Hi Tech Tracking Tethers Parolees

By John Knicely

Shauna Larson and Elaine Potter are from out of town and until Channel 6 News spoke with them, they really hadn't thought about crossing paths with someone being tracked through a monitoring device.

Larson, who was visiting from Minnesota said, "honestly I never really thought about the fact that they could be out among us in public." Potter wondered, "are there a lot of people walking around with monitors?"

Actually, the number of offenders wearing GPS tracking devices in the metro area is quite small.

At the time Channel 6 News broadcast this story, there were 434 men and women on parole in the Omaha Metro area and 31 of them were being monitored electronically. Of the 6357 adults who were on probation in the Omaha area only 1 was wearing a monitor. There were 812 juveniles on probation in Omaha and 43 were under court order to wear a tracking device.

The State Parole Board or the courts determine which offenders are required to wear monitors and generally the devices are assigned to those who are considered higher risk.

A parolee named John, who spoke to Channel 6 News on the condition that his real name and crime not be disclosed, referred to his ankle monitoring bracelet as "a scarlet letter."

He served three years in prison and while on parole for the last two and a half years, he has been careful to hide the device under his sock.

"If you're seen in public," he said, "people automatically judge you as a criminal, somebody you don't want to talk to, or associate with."

John pays the \$180 per month operating cost that would otherwise be covered by taxpayers.

From the standpoint of parole officers it's a different story. Paul Accardy, who has been on the job for more than 35 years, considers the satellite monitoring system "a 100 percent improvement."

Accardy recalled the old, time consuming method of "driving all around the city to track down and make contact with our parolees."

"Now we're even issued smart phones," he said, "and we have the software installed on the phone so that we can track them when we're in the field."

Todd Rosenthal, a Senior Parole Officer said, "lets say that someone was assaulted around a certain area and he's a suspect and our tracking log shows that he's been around that area, then that gives police pretty good information that he could be a suspect."

That was evident in the case of an armed home invasion in Omaha on Labor Day of this year. Police quickly arrested a suspect who was they say was placed at the scene of the crime through an ankle monitoring device that he was wearing. Parole for Steven K. Tubbs has been revoked and he's back behind bars.

Rosenthal pointed out that, "on other occasions a suspect has been cleared because of the monitoring system."

John, who will wear an ankle monitoring bracelet for another six months said, "I believe it can be a deterrent for some parolees."

"For those who are doing well," he added, "it's extra incentive to keep doing well, it's always there and it never comes off, two and a half years and it's never come off."

