

Allen parolees to test GPS monitoring

By Amanda Iacone
The Journal Gazette

The state Department of Correction is using Allen County to test a new Global Positioning System that will monitor sex offenders and violent offenders on parole.

The Allen County Commissioners approved an agreement Friday to allow the year-long pilot program, which will be paid for by the state. The program will allow the state to test the GPS system, which would eventually monitor all sex and violent offenders on parole as required by state law.

Lawmakers mandated last year that all violent and sex offenders released from state prison on parole be constantly monitored. Existing monitoring systems use radio frequencies, however, and community corrections staff can detect only when the offender enters or leaves his or her home, said Sheila Hudson, Allen County Community Corrections director. Parolees are former state prison inmates who have been released from prison but are still monitored.

Community corrections monitors offenders who are sentenced to home detention instead of time in prison. The department also administers a program called Re-entry Court, an intensive mentoring, court-supervised program intended to help offenders move from prison to freedom. It also involves electronic monitoring.

New GPS technology can track an offender's every move and can alert the offender if he or she enters an "exclusion zone." The zones could surround a local park or a victim's home, work or school, said Stan Pflueger, Allen County Community Corrections spokesman.

Staff members monitoring offenders' movement can send law enforcement to check on the offender if he or she doesn't leave the area, Pflueger said.

Participants in the pilot program must have a telephone line in their home, and other adults in the home must allow police to search the home periodically. The parolees will also participate in case management through community corrections.

The state will pay a Colorado company to lease its software and monitoring equipment that goes with the offender.

The state will also pay Allen County \$14 a day per person for its case management and staffing.

Community corrections has already hired additional staff to monitor the 50 new offenders and plans to hire a few more, Pflueger said. Currently three people work in the monitoring area each shift.

More people are needed to monitor the vast amounts of information the GPS trackers will provide. Community corrections will likely move toward using GPS tracking for the home-detention and Re-Entry Court programs it currently runs. Community corrections staff currently monitor 425 people, Pflueger said.

On the whole, the GPS tracking will be good for the community, he said.

"For years people like this have been in the community," Pflueger said. "Technology has not allowed us to monitor them at this level of intensity."

The commissioners were concerned that the pilot program would bring more sex offenders into Allen County. But Hudson said it would not as the program is just for Allen County parolees.

In the future, community corrections could provide monitoring for offenders in other counties, she said.

The county has about a third of the equipment needed for the pilot program. The Division of Parole Services, part of the Department of Correction, still must recommend the 50 offenders, Pflueger said.