



Continuous Transdermal Alcohol Monitoring: A Practitioner's Guide

Executive Summary

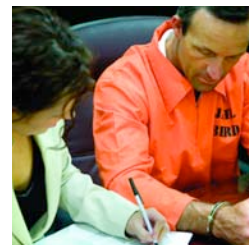
This document is the second in a three-part series. The first report was an educational primer on continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring, and was released in November 2006. This report is designed to assist practitioners with incorporating continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring technologies into existing supervision practices. It is a practitioner's guide developed with input from researchers, criminal justice practitioners, treatment professionals, and service providers in several states. It can assist staff in becoming comfortable with – and confident in – the use of continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring technology, and provide them with a framework in which to develop a comprehensive set of practices and policies for applying this technology to offenders with diagnosed alcohol issues.

The areas addressed in the document include:

- Goals and eligibility criteria
- Roles and responsibilities of participants
- Screening, assessment, and referral practices
- Intake and installation procedures
- Data collection, monitoring, and reporting
- Length of monitoring period
- Graduated responses
- Court testimony
- Fee collection
- De-installation procedures

To facilitate the development of evidence-based practices, a brief questionnaire for practitioners is included in the Appendix to the full report. It can help agencies understand the implementation process and contribute to the development of “evidence-based practices” in their jurisdictions. This survey can assist agencies in identifying problem areas, refining the implementation process, and streamlining the use of technologies.

The contents of this practitioner's guide are derived from a series of in-depth telephone interviews with a small sample of field practitioners possessing considerable experience using technologies in general, as well as practical experience using the Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor (SCRAM®), the only commercially-available continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring technology on the market to date. Training and educational efforts relating to the functioning and use of the technology are recommended prior to reviewing this document.



Goals and eligibility criteria

- *Continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring technology is intended to support multiple agency goals including: increasing public and victim safety; distinguishing between high- and low-risk offenders; promoting behavioral change; and reducing jail/prison populations. Offender eligibility must be guided by the purpose for which the technology is being used.*
- *Continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring technology is best suited for offenders who have a history of persistent drinking behavior and non-compliance; have difficulty maintaining sobriety; have been unsuccessful in a treatment setting; or who have custody of minor children.*
- *Eligibility should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, according to pre-selected criteria. Some offenders may be excluded based on pre-existing medical conditions or technical knowledge that allows the offender to compromise or circumvent monitoring.*

Roles and responsibilities of participants

- *The role of court/probation officers is to provide appropriate supervision to pre-trial defendants/offenders; ensure compliance with court-ordered conditions of supervision; actively encourage successful completion of supervision; enhance public safety; and coordinate services with treatment providers.*
- *The role of service providers is to facilitate the effective use of the technology to enhance supervision practices and provide assistance and support to court/probation agencies, which enables defendants/offenders to successfully complete the requirements of supervision.*
- *Specific duties are outlined in the full report.*

Screening and assessment

- *Agencies are encouraged to employ a screening mechanism to identify offenders with moderate to serious substance abuse issues who are suitable for supervision using a continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring technology.*
- *Screening can ensure that offenders who are most in need of controlling their drinking behavior and pose the greatest risk to the public are effectively monitored.*
- *An assessment can provide insight into an appropriate period of supervision.*

Referral practices

- *Streamlined referral processes can ensure the offender is rapidly introduced to the technology following arraignment or sentencing.*
- *The rate of referrals may vary among agencies, according to several factors.*
- *It is essential that the caseloads and workloads of probation officers/support personnel are closely monitored in the first several months to ensure that workloads do not become overwhelming, and that events are responded to swiftly and appropriately.*

Intake and installation procedures

- *Strategically designed intake and installation procedures can save time, energy, and resources over the long-term.*
- *Agencies that opt to retain responsibility for intake and installation increase their workload but save costs.*
- *Agencies generally prefer that service providers complete these tasks. Practitioners should be familiar with this process, even if they are not directly responsible for completing these tasks.*
- *The manufacturer provides standard training to service providers and agencies, and has developed standard procedures that govern the quality of this process.*

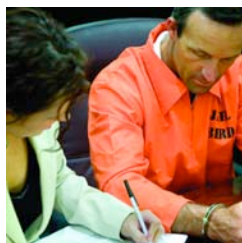
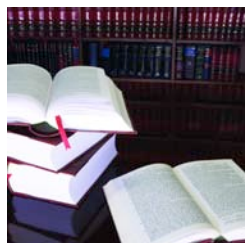
- *Service providers collect relevant information from offenders, and provide them with the necessary information and educational materials. Informing and educating the offender at the outset reduces the burden on officers during the monitoring period.*
- *Intake and installation can occur at the courthouse, the probation agency, service provider office, or other specified location either immediately following sentencing or at a scheduled time.*

Data collection, monitoring, and reporting

- *Information from the device is date- and time-stamped and collected hourly; this information can be downloaded once or up to six times daily at pre-determined times.*
- *The data collected by the device can serve as an ongoing risk assessment tool that indicates which offenders refrain from drinking, and which offenders require closer supervision.*
- *This technology allows officers to identify “problem” offenders according to drinking behavior so they can devote greater time and resources to effectively manage them and reinforce positive behavior.*
- *Agencies should develop a policy on monitoring compliance to address specific issues such as level of communication and frequency of contact; methods of documenting relevant information; and methods to confirm compliance.*
- *Alcohol Monitoring Systems, Inc. (AMS) employs exception-based reporting. Events reported to court/probation agencies include confirmed alcohol consumption events, tampering, obstructions, unauthorized removals, and failures to download data. Agencies can specify their preferred methods by which they want to receive this information (e.g., email, fax).*
- *Trained and certified AMS staff analyzes and interprets the data collected by the device, using conservative and well-defined criteria validated using live test subjects.*
- *At the request of the agency, AMS can generate a variety of standard reports that will allow agencies to monitor offender progress and review their entire caseloads.*
- *Agencies are strongly encouraged to share relevant information with treatment providers to assist in the recovery process.*

Length of monitoring period

- *The length of the monitoring period varies substantially depending on the offender, his/her criminal history, level of compliance, and other factors such as the ability of the offender to sustain the costs associated with the device.*
- *Research on executive cognitive functioning concludes that a minimum period of 90 days of sobriety is needed to begin countering the effect of alcohol and correcting impairments in thinking (Zinn et al. 2004). Treatment professionals familiar with the various devices generally report that a longer period of supervision is beneficial and achieves better outcomes.*
- *Researchers are still trying to determine the most effective monitoring timeframe.*



Graduated responses

- *Officers should be prepared to manage and respond to all events (which may occur frequently at the outset), including drinking/tampers/obstructions, using graduated responses early in the supervision period.*
- *Practitioners should recognize that this workload should decrease over time as offenders become accustomed to the devices and levels of compliance increase.*
- *A few jurisdictions are beginning to move toward implementing performance-based measures that are based on an offender's level of compliance.*
- *As with any form of electronic monitoring, it is good practice to have a contingency plan in place to deal with absconders.*

Court testimony

- *Legal challenges to the technology should not be unexpected.*
- *To date, rulings have been generally positive and support the use of the technology.*
- *The manufacturer provides training and support in these areas.*

Fee collection

- *Either the court, probation agency, or the service provider may elect to take responsibility for collecting fees.*
- *Generally, higher collections rates are achieved by service providers which reduces the workload of supervision staff.*
- *Jurisdictions should refer to any relevant legislation pertaining to this issue before developing a policy.*

De-installation procedures

- *De-installation procedures can be completed by either the court, probation agency, or service provider.*
- *The manufacturer provides appropriate information and training in this area.*
- *Practitioners should be familiar with this process, even if they are not directly responsible for completing these tasks.*

Greater efforts are needed to educate agencies about the use of these technologies and the ways to streamline implementation to realize benefits. Educational efforts can lead to greater consistency in project development, and provide opportunities for large-scale evaluations to identify effective practices. In this regard, the tools that have been developed to support the use of continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring can facilitate the use of this technology. Practitioners acknowledge that these materials have assisted agencies in managing workloads, and have provided them with the tools and education needed to use this technology. This level of education, guidance, and regulation is strongly encouraged and can benefit the application of all electronic monitoring technologies.



Full report available at:
www.trafficinjuryresearch.com

