

Bringing service to life

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'Tagging' – The Truth, Myths & Legends

Electronic Monitoring of curfews imposed as a requirement of a community penalty has been available to the courts since 1999, in that time various myths and legends have become common currency; hopefully, this article will clarify some misunderstandings. Many have already been mentioned on TV programmes, the press, and indeed used as mitigation in court.

Since April 2005 the service providers have not been allowed to use existing telephones at the place of curfew, but instead must use mobile telephone systems, unless there are special circumstances such as there being no mobile coverage in a particular area. Indeed, more than 96% of current monitoring is conducted by mobile systems.

It has been claimed that the 'tag' can be removed by stretching or heating the strap with a cigarette lighter. No such incident has ever been recorded; it takes little imagination to consider the damage that would be inflicted by a naked flame held against a leg. Even if the strap were stretched, internal mechanisms detect the attempt to tamper and warn the service providers immediately; a visit is made to replace the tag and breach proceedings are commenced. Urban myth has it that they have been put onto dogs, this has never been demonstrated and is always an apocryphal or third hand story.

A common misunderstanding is that subjects can be tracked and their whereabouts made known. Curfew monitoring only provides the ability to detect if a subject is where he/she should be, during certain times. They can not be tracked away from the place of curfew.

It is true that the tag can be easily cut off – this is a health & safety issue. However, any attempt to remove the tag is immediately recorded and the matter is dealt with by way of breach. It is not possible for the tag to 'fall off' or 'come off accidentally' as has been claimed. The tags are tested robustly by the Scientific Development branch of the Ministry of Justice annually and reported as being secure within pre-determined tolerances. Subjects believe that no action is taken when they breach, this is again a misunderstanding as all violations are recorded and acted upon within protocols.

Another frequently used excuse is - 'I was in the bath'. During the early days of the piloting of electronic monitoring it was soon established that cast iron baths may impede the radio signals. To avoid this happening the signals are tested from the bath and equipment is situated within the place of curfew to receive signals, thereby removing this excuse. Judging by the number of occasions 'the bath' excuse is still used, and sometimes for periods well in excess of 2 hours, we have the cleanest offenders in the world!

It is not unknown for subjects to claim that the equipment does not work. In rebuttal of this claim, Serco have never received a report from a forensic scientist confirming that the equipment was malfunctioning.

Monthly audits of operations are conducted by the Ministry of Justice who confirm that currently service standards are maintained at contractual levels somewhere between 99% & 100%.

Electronic monitoring is now available as one of the community penalties, either stand alone or combined with another penalty for adults and juveniles. It can be used as a condition of bail for suitable defendants, and as a condition of early release from custody for eligible prisoners while allowing family life, employment and education to continue, without the impact of custody.

Should you require any further information, or have any questions about electronic monitoring please ask to speak to your local Service Delivery Officer who can be contacted by phoning the monitoring centre on 08080 152369 (Midlands & Wales) or 08080 965124 (London & East Anglia)