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## Device sends message if defendant is drinking

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**Belen** Steve Sanchez has been arrested four times for driving drunk. He has been to jail, he has been to rehab and he has been required to install an ignition interlock system in his truck.

Today, he also wears an ankle bracelet that monitors whether he has taken a drink.

The 57-year-old Belen man is the first in Valencia County to wear the bracelet known as SCRAM, Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor. Magistrate Danny Hawkes, who ordered that Sanchez wear the device last week, unveiled the device this week to the public and said he will be sentencing offenders who have alcohol problems to wear it.

"I hope this works," said Sanchez, who admits he has battled his alcohol problem for years. "It vibrates every half hour to every hour, 24 hours a day. It makes me very nervous, like they're watching me."

Sanchez says he's not only nervous because he's constantly being monitored but also because he can't drink. Not only has he not taken a drink since he's been fitted with the monitor, but he now has another reason not to.

"I don't want to relapse because I've done it about three times," said Sanchez, who opted to wear the bracelet in lieu of being sent back to jail. "I've been into treatment centers — I've been through everything. I just want to show people in Valencia County that, if you drink and drive, then there are consequences."

Now he's the guy wearing the oversize bracelet on his ankle.

The device analyzes the perspiration at least once an hour for alcohol through a tamper and water resistant anklet that's worn day and night. The information is then uploaded via a modem at least once a day to a monitoring center in Denver and is made available immediately to Hawkes.

The SCRAM ankle bracelet is currently being used in 42 states and is currently monitoring 4,500 individuals throughout the country. The technology is fairly new to New Mexico, only having been used minimally in San Juan County, and will be soon be introduced in both Lea and Eddy counties.

"Now that we've received money from the State Legislature to kick off our DWI court, we are also thinking of innovative ways to address the DWI problem in Valencia County," Hawkes said. "And hopefully, this catches on throughout the state."

In looking for a high level of accountability and compliance, Hawkes researched the program and feels that it will be an asset to the court by tracking defendants to see if they are obeying his orders. He said he would order the device for those on parole who have already been given mandatory sentences and jail time.

Hawkes said, depending on the case, he may order a first-time offender to wear the device for 30 to 90 days if he believes they have a problem with alcohol. He also said he may sentence others to wear it for

longer periods of time depending on how severe their problems are.

"This is an alcohol abuse tool, and I believe strongly in it because of the accountability level of this," he said. "We're kind of trying to step out of the box and try and address these issues in a different way to try and make a difference."

Frank Gentry, a retired Metropolitan Court judge and president of Sober New Mexico, said when he first heard of this technology, he was skeptical of its abilities. But once he traveled to Denver, where the devices are monitored, he discovered its benefits.

"I'm here to try and make sure that judges and probation departments across the state of New Mexico understand how important a tool this can be in really solving the DWI problem to a certain extent and also making this state a safer place," Gentry said. "And just because of what Judge Hawkes is going to do in this county, it's going to make Valencia County a much safer place for all the public who uses the streets."

Gentry said this technology is the first step to make sure that people wouldn't re-offend and keep people alcohol-free. He also said this device will not, and cannot, solve the alcohol problem, but with therapy and other tools such as the ignition interlock, it's a step in the right direction.

"What this device assures is that people won't drink, and that's a wonderful tool because then it doesn't matter if they get into a car," he added. "If they do in violation of a court order, then that's one thing to deal with. But generally speaking, what we don't want is intoxicated people in vehicles, and this makes sure people under court orders won't be intoxicated. It mandates court ordered abstinence."

Thirteenth Judicial District Attorney Lemuel Martinez said accountability is critical and his office is working to make sure defendants are following their conditions of probations. He also said being able to monitor DWI offenders is not only important for changing behaviors but to stop the cycle of addiction.

"It's an innovative program, and it's probably going to spread through the state of New Mexico once we realize its success here," Martinez said.

Matthew Mitchell, the Rocky Mountain regional monitoring manager for Alcohol Monitoring System, the company that provides the SCRAM technology, said the device is a valuable tool to assist not only the courts with compliance, but for the individuals who are struggling with their addictions.

"We are the world's only device that's currently available to the criminal justice markets, and we've seen rapid adaptation," Mitchell said. "We're looking at a start of very progressive leadership in the county to evaluate this technology and integrate it into the DWI court platforms."

Mitchell said of the 61 million tests performed on 35,000 individuals, the program has a success rate of 85 percent.