

Ellis County, TX

***SCRAM[®] Goes Hand-in-Hand with Treatment
to Significantly Reduce Recidivism***



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***Richard Rodriguez,
Deputy Director, Ellis County
Community Supervision and
Corrections Department***

The Problem

Ellis County, TX lies directly adjacent to the south of the Dallas/Ft. Worth metro area. By Texas standards, the County is relatively small – spanning just 940 square miles with a population of approximately 134,000 (according to 2006 estimates). But in 2003, Ellis County had the sizeable problem of having the highest technical revocation rate for offenders in the entire Lone Star State. On the misdemeanor side, DWI offenders accounted for 80% of all revocations while felony DWI (third offense or more) was the second highest in the felony category – only behind other drug offenders. This problem was especially troubling given that Ellis County is a “dry” county.

“Once we identified our target populations, we had to develop strategies to more effectively deal with them,” says Richard Rodriguez, Deputy Director for the Ellis County Community Supervision and Corrections Department. “We were charged by the State to improve our revocation rates and began actively looking for ways to do so.”

At the time, Ellis County had a high repeat DWI offender rate. “Our officers were not referring clients to alcohol treatment programs – and it showed in the large number of offenders that we were seeing over and over again in our courts,” Rodriguez explains.

The County tried putting its repeat offenders on Antabuse, but with limited success. “The effectiveness of Antabuse is too dependent on how the pill reacts physiologically with the individual. We saw people who got very sick when they drank on Antabuse – and others with whom it had absolutely no effect,” says Rodriguez. He adds that the County’s Antabuse program was also very labor intensive, as offenders were required to be physically observed taking their daily medication and there was also no way to verify compliance on weekends.

The SCRAM Program

The search for a better solution led Rodriguez to SCRAM® (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor) in the summer of 2004. “We saw SCRAM at a conference in June, and were so impressed that we had our first client on it by August,” he says.

The majority of SCRAM cases in Ellis County are probation. All third-time or more DWI offenders are placed on SCRAM, as are alcohol offenders with three or more priors. Rodriguez says his team does an extensive case review on misdemeanor DWI cases by looking at criminal history patterns, as well as high blood alcohol levels or any outstanding issues that may present concern. Because this imposes a consistent metric on alcohol-related cases, the County maintains a constant population of offenders on SCRAM.

“We require a minimum of 90 days on SCRAM, but we really don’t consider removal until after six months,” says Rodriguez. “The considerations for removal are full or near completion of a substance abuse treatment program, active support group attendance and participation, a relapse prevention plan, and general program compliance.”

Technology and Treatment

Rodriguez advocates technology combined with treatment, which is why he believes SCRAM is such an integral part of the County’s alcohol offender program. “Usually when people continue to drink even while on probation, there are other problems going on in their lives – they can’t hold a job, have family issues, etc. That is one reason why combining treatment with an effective drinking deterrent like SCRAM is the only real way to reduce recidivism.”

As a former felony court supervisor in Dallas County, Rodriguez managed an offender day reporting center that stressed a combination of monitoring through face-to-face contact and therapeutic programming. He applies that same philosophy to Ellis County’s SCRAM program. “For all of our offenders, we combine SCRAM monitoring with treatment. Because the majority stay sober during their treatment period, this makes the likelihood of success that much greater,” he adds.

All SCRAM clients are ordered to complete supportive outpatient substance abuse treatment as a minimum requirement. SCRAM does not drive the type of treatment required other than to provide information about current alcohol use, which indicates the likelihood of relapse or the need for a higher level of treatment. In cases where the offender needs more intensive residential treatment, SCRAM is removed during treatment – but the offender is put back on SCRAM immediately upon release.

Rodriguez has the final say on an offender’s release from SCRAM based on a case review. “Our focus is that the offender needs to be firmly grounded in treatment/recovery before we consider releasing him or her from SCRAM.”

Program Results

To date, more than 100 alcohol offenders in Ellis County have been part of a program that combines SCRAM monitoring with treatment. “As a result, we have seen a definite and significant reduction in recidivism, and only a very small percentage of these people offend again,” Rodriguez adds.



- **Minimum SCRAM monitoring – 90 days**
- **Average monitored days – 218**
- **All SCRAM clients also in treatment**
- **Release from SCRAM contingent on successful treatment program completion**
- **Over 100 offenders completed SCRAM + treatment – 80% success rate**
- **Significant reduction in recidivism**



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