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Electronics Protect Victims

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[MANSFIELD] – The crucial point during which many domestic violence or crime victims face being assaulted again is between the initial report and the sentencing.

The Richland County Court Services Adult Probation Department has taken steps to stop such retaliation through its Victim Monitoring Program.

Electronic Detention Specialist Lisa Grant recalled one successful intervention.

“An offender had hitchhiked back to the residence of the victim,” she said. “He had made it onto the roof of the house when the victim monitor went off.”

“Within nine seconds, an officer was dispatched and we apprehended the offender,” she said. “The victim did not even know he was there until we informed her of the incident.”

Grant said the Victim Monitoring Program operates much like electronic monitoring used on offenders released from prison. Offenders wear an ankle monitor bracelet, while victims have a monitoring unit installed at their residence.

If an offender comes within a designated distance of the monitoring unit, an alarm goes off and the unit automatically calls 911.

The monitoring unit also doubles as a two-way speakerphone so victims can tell emergency personnel what is happening.

Grant said monitoring is not limited to a victim’s home.

“We also provide pagers that victims can carry with them in public,” she said. “If an offender is within a certain vicinity, the pager will alert the victim.”

Grant said when those situations happen, victims should remain in public among groups of people or locate a police officer immediately.

Chief Probation Officer Dave Leitenberger said the program has been successful in its four years of operation, despite limited funding.

“We’ve had only two instances of offenders approaching victims, but both were apprehended before they could make contact,” he said.

Leitenberger said funding for the program comes from the department’s budget and grants are usually only available for victims’ services after a repeat offense has been committed.

“We have not had a victim injured or killed while in the program,” he said.

HOW IT WORKS

- Richland County Court Services Adult Probation Department has 10 people under the Victim Monitoring Program.
- The program has had 60 cases to date, with an average length of 209 days of monitoring. Forty-six of the cases were court-ordered; 14 were requested by victims.
- The average response time to a victim monitor alert is between nine and 13 seconds.

For information on the program, contact Lisa Grant at (419) 774-4768.

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