



TECH b.e.a.t

Dedicated to Reporting Developments in Technology for Law Enforcement, Corrections, and Forensic Sciences

Corrections Assistance

According to the latest figures available from the Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Statistics, almost 2.25 million individuals are in the custody of this country's State and Federal prisons and local jails. Also, just more than 1.5 million individuals are under the jurisdiction of State or Federal correctional authorities. Jurisdiction refers to the legal authority of a State or Federal correctional system over a prisoner, regardless of location or type of facility where the prisoner is housed.

Add to these statistics the fact that prison admissions are outpacing prison releases and it becomes evident that correctional agencies, large and small, need all the assistance they can get. The Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has several technology-oriented initiatives underway to benefit the corrections field. In addition, NIJ is taking steps to expand its corrections technology portfolio in the coming years.

Technology Assessment

With the support of NIJ, the Northeast Technology Product Assessment Committee (NTPAC) began in 2000 as an initiative of the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. NTPAC brings together partners from 13 Northeast States in regular quarterly meetings comprising senior level correctional practitioners who identify and evaluate emerging technology products and prototypes that have the potential to significantly affect the correctional operation and mission.

NTPAC collaborates with the Association of State Correctional Administrators, John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, and NIJ and its Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization and National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center-Northeast to disseminate information throughout the northeast United States. (For more information on NTPAC, visit www.ntpac.org; also see "Going Beyond the Sales Pitch," *TechBeat* Fall 2003 at www.justnet.org/techbeat/fall2003/.)

Drawing on the success and collaborative approach of NTPAC, NIJ recently created similar groups to serve the Southeast and the West. Eventually, plans call for the

three groups to collaborate to identify best practices and discuss technology needs and priorities for corrections.

"Of all the initiatives we undertake, technology assessment proves to be the most useful," says NIJ Corrections Program Manager Jack Harne. "Lots of agencies at the State and local levels don't know how to review technology properly before they buy a product. This forum will give them needed skills."

Using NTPAC as a model, the newly formed committees will—

- Identify correctional technology needs.
- Evaluate products and services.
- Convene quarterly meetings to share information regarding product evaluation.
- Develop partnerships and share information with correctional administrators throughout their respective regions.

"One thing you learn is that different agencies are at different levels relative to technology review," Harne says. "The most important part of this whole process is to bring them together and orient them to properly review technology. Eventually, NIJ plans to expand this effort to include a Web-based forum for information sharing on a national level."

RISK PREDICTION

By employing existing crime-mapping tools to develop a Web-based trend analysis system, the Florida Department of Corrections is creating a correctional crime-mapping and information-management system to monitor daily operations and identify trends, patterns, hotspots, and areas of concern for correctional managers.

Called COTAS (Correctional Operational Trend Analysis System), this NIJ-supported project uses archived data to look for patterns in such areas as inmate health and conduct. According to Harne, the creation of analytical tools using statistics, data modeling techniques, and mapping will help identify key indicators of disruption,

violence, and institutional risk, which in turn will help administrators proactively minimize negative impacts. The implementation of COTAS will place Florida in the forefront of development and application of technology in correctional operations.

CELL PHONE DETECTION AND DEFEAT

As cell phones become smaller, smuggling them inside correctional facilities becomes easier. In turn, inmates find it easier to continue their criminal activities, harass victims, or transmit photographs.

“Cell phones are a real, major issue. Almost every correctional agency has problems with cell phones,” Harne says. “We need to eliminate the phones or at the least render them useless in the correctional facility.”

According to Harne, NIJ has begun the first part of a multiphase project. The initial phase calls for a needs assessment that will draw input from representatives of the cell phone industry, law enforcement, and corrections. On completion of the needs assessment, the project will move on to a technical survey and gap analysis of existing cell phone detection technology. This project, Harne says, was tagged as a high priority by NIJ’s Corrections Technology Working Group, which provides guidance relating to technology needs and operational requirements relating to the field of corrections.

ON THE HORIZON

Although putting affordable technology that meets end-user needs and requirements into the hands of practitioners does not happen overnight, Harne says that NIJ plans to expand its existing technology assistance to corrections. In a solicitation released in March of last year, NIJ proposed six projects for research and development. These projects include—

- **Contraband detection.** This technology will consist of a single transportable device that will detect a broad spectrum of all types of contraband, including weapons and cell phones.
- **Data analysis and integration.** Primarily a software package that will analyze datasets of information such as inmate telephone call records, financial data, and other similar information, this program will extract information and identify trends that might be related to criminal activity. Secondarily, it will be able to be integrated with other systems so that information can be shared among several facilities.
- **Duress alarm system.** Corrections professionals specifically need a personal alarm system that is cost-effective, accurate, reliable, and works both indoors and out. A modification of existing technology to meet these requirements could satisfy this need.

- **Traffic identification system.** This technology will provide continuous real-time tracking of both staff and inmates in indoor and outdoor environments. It must be able to resist tampering by inmates and be small and unobtrusive.
- **Surveillance and monitoring.** To meet this technology request, a system will need to provide automatic alerts to correctional officials if an inmate is detected trying to escape or act violently. A “smart” camera is an example of this type of technology.
- **Multi-threat biohazard protective apparel.** This request calls for the design of an entire uniform—shirt, pants, gloves, and so on—that could be worn at all times and protect officers from contact with blood, body fluids, and chemical hazards. It will need to be lightweight, comfortable, and durable.

For more information regarding NIJ’s Corrections Technology Program, visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/corrections/technology.htm. Or contact Jack Harne, 202-616-2911 or jack.harne@usdoj.gov.

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