

# Federal Location Monitoring Program

Federal courts supervise many defendants and convicted offenders in the community, either before trial, after release from incarceration, or while serving sentences that do not require imprisonment. This section describes only the federal court system's use of location monitoring.

## **What Is Location Monitoring?**

Location monitoring is a court-ordered alternative to incarceration. Individuals may engage in limited, supervised activities in the community, with electronic technology to help verify compliance.

A judge determines the extent to which people are monitored on a case-by-case basis, based on the law and on an assessment of risk. Some individuals are required to remain in their residence 24 hours per day, while others are allowed to leave for preapproved and scheduled activities, such as for work, school, treatment, church, attorney appointments, court appearances, or court-ordered obligations.

Probation and pretrial services officers enforce the court's terms of supervision. Officers receive electronic notification when an individual moves into or out of approved or prohibited areas, or if the device is tampered with or removed.

## **How Does It Support Public Safety?**

Protecting the public is a paramount concern of the federal criminal justice system. While pretrial detention and post-conviction imprisonment both play important roles, most people who have been incarcerated eventually return to their communities. Location monitoring is one tool used by federal probation and pretrial services officers to supervise these individuals.

It is important to note that although location monitoring may reduce the risk of re-offending, it does not eliminate risk. No supervision method or tool can prevent all defendants or offenders from committing new crimes, or from absconding while under supervision.

However, as part of a well-designed and executed supervision strategy, location monitoring is an important tool that helps officers maintain awareness and monitor compliance.

Officers do not track a person's movement in the community in real time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But activity reports and emergency alerts can help the officer intercede if conditions ordered by the judge are violated.

## **Who Is Monitored?**

Community supervision is used primarily for three categories of individuals:

Defendants on bail who are awaiting trial.

Convicted offenders who serve some or all of their sentence in the community, instead of in prison.

Former federal inmates who are on supervised release after leaving prison.

For some offenses, community supervision is mandatory. Where the law permits a choice between incarceration and community supervision, federal judges make the decision. In recommending location

monitoring to the court, probation and pretrial services officers consider the risks posed by the defendant or offender.

Not everyone in community supervision requires location monitoring. Electronic monitoring technology is used more frequently for sex offenders or violent offenders. It also may be used as a sanction when people violate their conditions of supervision.

### **What Technologies Are Used?**

Location monitoring was first used by the federal Judiciary in 1986. Officers monitored participants through random telephone calls and weekly in-person contacts.

Today, location monitoring (formerly known as electronic monitoring) relies on three distinct technologies.

Radio frequency units transmit a signal verifying that a person is at home during required hours. RF units do not monitor individuals once they move outside the device's tracking range.

Global Positioning System units require users to wear transmitters at all times. A signal enables officers to track a person's location outside the home. An alert also is sent if a person under supervision tampers with the device or attempts to remove it. GPS provides more comprehensive and real-time information than other location monitoring technologies.

A less frequently used technology is voice verification. Individuals periodically check in by telephone, leaving a message that can be checked against a voice "fingerprint" to verify their whereabouts. Voice verification is intended to target low risk defendants and offenders.

### **What Is the Officer's Role?**

Even when location monitoring is used, electronic technology is just one tool. Supervising officers play an essential role in promoting compliance and assisting in rehabilitation.

Officers consider many factors, including the risk posed by the defendant or offender, when recommending a location monitoring condition to the court.

When a federal judge orders location monitoring, supervising officers:

Check to make sure offenders and defendants are adhering to their approved schedules.

Check monitoring equipment to make sure that it is working and to look for signs of tampering.

Respond to and investigate alerts, including:

Unauthorized absence from home

Failure to return home after an authorized absence

Leaving home early or returning home late

Entrance into or near an unauthorized area

Step in to control and correct the situation if people on location monitoring:

Don't adhere to their approved leave schedule

Go to an unapproved location

Tamper with equipment

Otherwise fail to comply with the program rules or their release conditions

### **What Are the Officer's Challenges?**

Supervising people on location monitoring is demanding, time-consuming, and sometimes dangerous. Officers must make frequent phone calls to verify that individuals are adhering to their approved schedules. They also make frequent, unannounced face-to-face visits.

Federal officers must respond to and investigate certain types of electronic alerts 24 hours a day, seven days a week. On average, three to four alerts per month for each person under supervision require immediate investigation.

### **What Are the Benefits?**

Location monitoring allows people on supervision to remain in the community and begin to rebuild their lives. They can attend school or get and hold down jobs during their period of supervision—important factors in rehabilitation. Community supervision also costs much less than incarceration.

Location monitoring reduces risks by limiting a person's movements and opportunity to commit violations. GPS technology also can be used to verify that an individual is in an authorized location, or is in or near an unauthorized location. This increases the chances that officers can intercede either before or while a violation or new offense is occurring.

Even when an offense is committed, GPS technology can help provide last location information to law enforcement officials trying to locate a fugitive.

### **Significant numbers**

- Approximately 6,000 people are assigned to federal location monitoring at any given time in the federal system.
- In 2016, 15 percent of federal offenders on post-conviction supervision and 22 percent of federal defendants were on some form of location monitoring. The average length of location monitoring was 154 days.
- 99 percent of pretrial defendants on federal location monitoring remain free of any arrest for a violent offense during supervision.
- 86 percent of offenders placed on location monitoring at the time of sentencing remained free of any new arrest, during their term of supervision.
- 97 percent of offenders placed on location monitoring at the time of sentencing remain free of any arrest for a violent offense, during their term of supervision.
- Offenders placed on location monitoring during their term of supervision are twice as likely to be high risk, compared with those not on location monitoring.
- When utilized in lieu of detention or prison, location monitoring costs taxpayers approximately \$4 per day, compared with \$87 a day for pretrial detention and \$95 a day for post-conviction imprisonment.