

Case Study: Charlotte -Mecklenburg Police Department

Solution: Omnilink Electronic Monitoring

Using electronic monitoring to reduce recidivism and solve crimes

Tracking pretrial offenders with the Omnilink™ solution helps deter repeat offenses and solve crimes faster



The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department serves roughly 850,000 citizens in the city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in North Carolina.

CMPD's 1,849 sworn officers and 452 civilian employees cover a jurisdiction of 438 square miles. This includes eight officers, a sergeant and two civilian staff who manage the department's Electronic Monitoring Unit, which was established in 2007. The unit monitors roughly 400 offenders each day.

Problem

In response to a sharp increase in robberies and other violent crimes in 2006, CMPD launched a street crimes task force of 70 officers charged with enforcing a 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. curfew for known offenders.

The curfew was labor-intensive, costly and slow. Officers had to personally check, in pairs, on each offender under court-ordered supervision. The department needed a more efficient way to monitor these offenders.

Solution

Omnilink, a Numerex solution, was the perfect fit for the department's electronic monitoring (EM) needs, said Lt. Lebraun Evans, who supervises the CMPD Electronic Monitoring Unit. The program has been in place for nearly 10 years and is managed by a staff of 11.

The department chose the Omnilink solution because of its multiple connectivity options, two-way communication features and easy-to-use monitoring software, Evans said.

CMPD tracks an average of 400 individuals a day, mostly pretrial offenders under court order. A judge orders a monitor for a defendant as part of bonding out of jail. The program covers felony assault and property crimes, as well as escalating domestic violence.

The system is easy to learn and use, and CMPD trains new officers as they come into the unit. In fact, a single officer can manage an overnight shift alone.

"The software is extremely user-friendly," said Evans. "We have them ready to work on their own in about a month."

Evans said the small unit could not successfully monitor so many offenders daily without the Omnilink EM solution. The department spends roughly a half a million dollars a year for the entire EM unit – including salary, overtime, supplies and vendor fees – to monitor about 400 people each day, making the cost per offender less than \$5 a day.

Multiple tracking signals

The Omnilink EM solution consists of the OM400 device and FocalPoint application. The OM400 ankle bracelet collects location points for each offender and uploads the location data to the FocalPoint app, which allows members of the CMPD Electronic Monitoring Unit to track hundreds of offenders 24/7.

The ankle bracelet uses both GPS and cellular signals to provide overlapping coverage for location. If an individual is indoors or in an area with poor GPS coverage, cellular connectivity with triangulation kicks in to help better locate that offender in those circumstances

CMPD draws virtual fences on the map within the EM system to mark the restricted locations for each offender and provides printed maps for each person showing the areas they must avoid.

“That electronic fence is set up to keep the offender away from that particular area,” Evans said. “We actually print it out in color, have a judge sign it, have the offender sign it, and then we give them a copy of it so that they know where they’re not supposed to be.”

The FocalPoint app is configurable for each department, and CMPD has it set to provide a pop-up alert and send a text and email to each member of the unit when an offender crosses a boundary. Officers can then send a warning tone to the offender’s ankle bracelet or call the offender.

Two-way communication saves PD time

The ankle bracelet and app also provide two-way communication, which enables remote check-ins and alerts.

If an offender’s battery is running low, the ankle bracelet vibrates automatically and alerts CMPD, and the offender must press the acknowledgement button. An audible tone means call CMPD immediately.

This saves a lot of time and manpower, said Evans, because CMPD officers can communicate with offenders remotely instead of having to make in-person visits.

“With the number of people that we were monitoring, a lot of times that had to be patrol, and so it was an additional burden on them because there just aren’t enough members in my unit to go visit people that often,” he said. “Because it’s done automatically, that saves us from having to continually call or check.”

The two-way communication can be used for a variety of messages, and Evans said CMPD uses it to communicate new developments in an offender’s case, as well as to warn of a low battery or that someone has crossed a line into forbidden territory.

Crime scene correlation

CMPD also uses the Omnilink EM solution as an investigative tool. EM data helps detectives solve crimes faster because the system provides the ability to identify or eliminate suspects or witnesses by linking monitored individuals to crime scenes.

Numerex sends EM reports with the location data collected by each offender’s OM400 ankle bracelet to CMPD several times an hour, plus a master file every night containing all locations where each offender has been for the past 24 hours. This data is integrated with the department’s records management system,

“It’s a strong deterrent when you know that if you commit a crime, we’re going to know that you were there.”

Lt. Lebraun Evans

which then compares it to crime reports to highlight which offenders were near reported crime scenes.

Any CMPD officer looking at a case report in the RMS can click a link to view electronic monitoring participants in the vicinity, and the system will tell them exactly who was there, how long they were there and how close they were.

Evans said this data is not used as the basis for an arrest, but it provides invaluable investigative leads that help detectives close cases faster.

“There have been numerous cases where we’ve been able to put someone at the scene, but they were a witness, so now we have a witness we know was there who was never going to come forward,” he said. “It saves us a lot of time.”

Results

Evans said the department makes 90 to 100 arrests and solves dozens of crimes each year using the Omnilink EM data, including three murders in the past five years. He also said the EM data can exonerate persons of interest who were not involved in the crime to help narrow the field of potential suspects, speeding up the investigation.

“With that daily report, the detective can eliminate some of those known suspects,” he said. “That’s actually a big time-saver for us, because we’re not wasting time on people that we know for a fact weren’t there.”

Perhaps more telling is the recidivism rate among monitored offenders. CMPD reports an impressive 3 to 5 percent recidivism rate among its monitored offenders, much lower than the 80 percent national average reported by the National Institute of Justice.

Evans said this is evidence that EM is a valuable tool for fighting crime.

“It’s a strong deterrent when you know that if you commit a crime, we’re going to know that you were there,” he said.

Related video:

The Omnilink EM system from Numerex can help you keep a watchful eye on offenders, <http://www.policeone.com/police-products/police-technology/videos/237992519-FocalPoint-from-Numerex/>

Related resource:

Get info from Numerex, <http://numerex.com/markets/public-safety/>