

BI GroupGuard Plus

with Victor Rompa, Director of Product Development



Halfway houses have grown as an alternative to incarceration for higher risk offenders. For many of these offenders, electronic monitoring supervision is an ideal option. Victor Rompa, Director of Product Development, oversaw the research, development and field testing of GroupGuard Plus, a monitoring system specifically for group homes. Victor answered a number of questions about this innovative group offender monitoring system below.

Q: *What exactly is GroupGuard Plus?*

A: The GroupGuard Plus system components include: a non-removable ankle-mounted bracelet transmitter worn by each individual offender living in the group environment; a centrally located receiver, or field monitoring device, installed in the residential home; and a host central monitoring computer. GroupGuard Plus requires minimal equipment and is easy-to-integrate into any group home or halfway house setting; all that's needed is a dedicated phone line and a standard AC power outlet.

Q: *Why did BI add a group offender electronic monitoring product to its extensive line of monitoring systems?*

A: BI was approached by one of the country's largest department's of corrections about the feasibility of developing an electronic monitoring product that could accurately, efficiently and easily monitor up to 75 parolees living under one roof. This proved to be an excellent opportunity for BI to focus on a system for offenders in group homes such as halfway houses.

Q: *What's the benefit of this system over traditional electronic monitoring in a group home setting?*

A: With the GroupGuard Plus system, only one receiver and one dedicated phone line are needed. As a result, there is less clutter in the group home or halfway house and less cost to the customer. Additionally, the system helps to alleviate expensive overcrowding at local jails and allows offenders an option for successfully reintegrating into a supervised community setting under electronic supervision.

Q: *How do the GroupGuard Plus components function together?*

A: The system uses the same principle as traditional electronic monitoring, such as our BI HomeGuard® 200 system. The individual's schedule is entered into the host monitoring computer. This maintains an offender's curfews and scheduled times away from home. As the person returns to the group home, the system time stamps this activity. Any out of schedule or tampering violations are noted by the group monitoring system, the supervising agency is notified, and action is taken if necessary by the local agency.

Q: *Are there special equipment considerations for GroupGuard Plus?*

A: Yes. Currently, a dedicated phone line is needed at a group home setting. This helps avoid communication interference with all other calls that may be made at the home.

Q: *How does the GroupGuard Plus system distinguish between individual offenders' transmitters?*

A: The key concept with the design of this new system is a receiver, or field monitoring device, that "listens" for transmissions from multiple transmitters. Building on the success of BI's proven radio-frequency technology, the GroupGuard Plus field monitoring device receives signals from multiple transmitters, which distinguish between individual offenders (based on a serial code number) and provide an accurate account of whether an offender is in compliance with their prescribed schedule.

Q: *What are the key features of GroupGuard Plus?*

A: First and foremost, there is only one monitoring unit installed in the residence, reducing clutter and cost. There is also a "variable leave window" feature as well as multiple range settings that vary how far an individual may move from the monitoring unit. Alerts, as with our traditional EM systems, are issued via pager, fax, telephone, email or a combination of these methods. There are multiple tamper-resistant capabilities, a 48-hour backup battery, and a 20,000 message storage capability, among other features.

Q: *Why is this "usability" factor so critical to the end user of the system, a community corrections officer?*

A: Once the base monitoring unit is set up in the residence, adding or subtracting individuals is very easy. Merely input the information into the computer. No tools are required for installing an ankle transmitter on a person. This allows the officer to focus on managing their caseload and not equipment.

Q: *What cost savings should I expect using GroupGuard Plus?*

A: While the costs will depend on the location and contract terms, in general there are some costs that can be saved through the use of this system. First, if an offender can be moved from incarceration to a group home setting due to the extra layer of supervision GroupGuard Plus affords, this daily rate of incarceration minus the nominal daily costs of the system are achieved. Second, a person on a group monitoring system costs less than an individual on a single electronic monitoring system. One DOC using the system is monitoring 200 parolees daily; they will save more than \$150,000 in the first year alone through the lower cost of GroupGuard Plus versus a traditional electronic monitoring system.
