



The Facts: Debunking Misconceptions About Electronic Monitoring

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Community correctional agencies have used electronic monitoring (EM) a supervision tool since 1985. In the U.S., EM device volume more than doubled between 2005 and 2015.¹ This growth is due in part to recent technological advancements and an acceptance that EM is an effective supervision tool as part of a comprehensive case management plan.

A study conducted by the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, and cited in a recent report from the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), considers electronic monitoring a valuable community supervision tool that allows justice-involved individuals to remain in their communities while preserving employment, the family unit, a residence, and critical resources that help improve lives.^{2,3} EM is proven to positively enhance public safety.⁴ Used appropriately, EM offers positive outcomes when measuring compliance and short-term behavior modification. There are several misconceptions wrongly attributed to this technology, including but not limited to:

MYTH	FACT
1 EM is a “digital shackle” or just another form of incarceration (i.e., e-carceration).	Individuals on EM serve a portion of their sentence in the community. Unlike incarceration, EM is significantly more cost effective, enabling individuals to attend work, school, and religious services and maintain family and community ties. ¹¹
2 EM does not produce positive outcomes and has minimal effect on reducing recidivism.	For compliant individuals, EM provides structure and accountability to avoid negative behaviors, which considerably minimizes risk of recidivism. When combined with rehabilitative services to address criminogenic needs, EM compliance and effectiveness increases. ^{5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13}
3 EM is not cost-effective.	Incarceration costs are as much as six times higher than EM costs. ² Releasing lower-risk individuals on EM saves counties and states money, freeing bed space for higher-risk individuals.
4 Individuals on EM feel incarcerated and fear punishment for the smallest violation.	EM increases responsibility and supports positive behavior change. Agencies work to ensure revocations only occur as a last resort. ⁸
5 Individuals report skin irritations, and some medical procedures (e.g. MRIs, X-rays) cannot be done while EM is worn.	Most EM straps are hypo-allergenic, lighter, more comfortable, and less abrasive to the skin than ever before. Technology has advanced, and options now exist for wrist-worn devices or smartphone applications in lieu of wearing an ankle monitor. Individuals with specific skin-sensitive medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, skin allergies, etc.) are not ideal candidates for EM. Device straps can be cut with scissors in a medical emergency.
6 EM fees are unfair, and clients are subject to incarceration if they are unable to pay.	Not all individuals on EM are required to pay fees. Supervising agencies determine whether fees must be paid and any consequences for non-payment. ¹⁴
7 Clients are required to charge equipment multiple times a day and must be tethered to a wall for hours.	Battery charging typically takes no more than two hours in a 24-hour period, and more advanced systems simply require swapping a depleted battery for a fresh one. Battery technology continues to improve, and cordless charging options are available, eliminating the need to be “tethered” to a wall.

Additional Electronic Monitoring benefits include:

- According to probation and parole officers and other community corrections professionals, the majority of individuals on EM comply with court ordered sanctions, which enables officers to spend their valuable time on non-compliant cases.
- Most EM devices have tamper detection technologies, alerting officers if or when tampering occurs.
- When implemented with clear policies, EM is a cost-effective part of larger case management strategies designed to increase accountability and enhance public safety.

Research Studies on the Effectiveness of Electronic Monitoring

¹ Pew Charitable Trusts (2016). Use of electronic offender-tracking devices expands sharply – As of March 1, 2018

<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/09/use-of-electronic-offender-tracking-devices%20expands-sharply>

² The Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice Center for Criminology and Public Policy Research: A Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment of Electronic Monitoring – January 2010

<http://criminology.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/A-Quantitative-and-Qualitative-Assessment-of-Electronic-Monitoring.pdf>

³ American Probation & Parole Association: Incorporating Location Tracking Systems into Community Supervision – April 11, 2019

https://www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/APPAstances/ip_IL.pdf

⁴ Federal Probation. A journal of correctional philosophy and practice: Electronic Monitoring: Positive Intervention Strategies. Volume 69, Number 1

https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/69_1_5_0.pdf

⁵ A Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of Electronic Monitoring of Offenders – May 2020

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S004723522030026X>

· Description: This paper reports the findings of a systematic review on the effectiveness of Electronic Monitoring (EM) on reducing recidivism. It identifies mechanisms through which EM is expected to produce reductions in recidivism rates, under what conditions, and at what cost.

· Findings: Overall findings indicate that EM has been shown to produce positive effects for certain offenders (such as sex offenders), at certain points in the criminal justice process (post-trial instead of prison), and perhaps in combination with other conditions attached (such as geographic restrictions) and therapeutic components.

⁶ Can Electronic Monitoring Reduce Reoffending? – January 2019

<https://docs.iza.org/dp12122.pdf>

· Description: This research evaluates the impact of electronic monitoring as an alternative to prison on reoffending.

· Findings: Electronic monitoring reduces reoffending within 24 months by 16 percentage points compared to serving a prison sentence. For offenders who are less than 30, the reduction is 43 percentage points, with sizeable and significant reductions in reoffending persisting for 8 years. Our calculations suggest that criminal justice costs are reduced by around \$30,000 for each eligible offender who serves their sentence under electronic monitoring rather than in prison.

⁷ Better at Home Than in Prison? The Effects of Electronic Monitoring on Recidivism in France – January 2016

https://mobile.interieur.gouv.fr/content/download/106484/844483/file/Benjamin%20Monnery_avril2017.pdf

· Description: Many countries have recently adopted electronic monitoring as an alternative sentence in order to reduce incarceration while maintaining public safety. However, the empirical evidence on the effects of EM on recidivism (relative to prison) is very scarce worldwide. In this paper, we address this debated question using quasi-experimental data from France.

· Finding: Estimates show that fully converting prison sentences into electronic monitoring has long-lasting beneficial effects on recidivism, with estimated reductions in probability of reconviction of 6-7 percentage points (9-11%) after five years. There is also evidence that, in case of recidivism, EM leads to less serious offenses compared to prison. These beneficial effects are particularly strong on electronically monitored offenders who received control visits at home from correctional officers, were obliged to work while under EM, and had already experienced prison before. This pattern suggests that both rehabilitation and deterrence are important factors in reducing long-term recidivism, and that electronic monitoring can be a very cost-effective alternative to short prison sentences. However, the massive development of EM in France in recent years, with shorter and less intensive supervision, may reduce its effectiveness.

⁸ Monitoring High-Risk Gang Offenders with GPS Technology: An Evaluation of the California Supervision Program – November 2013

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/244164.pdf>

· Description: "The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of global positioning system (GPS) monitoring of high-risk gang offenders (HRGOs) who are released onto parole."

· Finding: This study provides evidence that GPS is an effective suppression tool to remove individual gang members from the community. The odds of a technical violation are 36 percent greater among the GPS group, while the odds of a nontechnical violation are 20 percent greater. Conversely, the GPS group is less likely to be rearrested overall (the chance of being rearrested is 26 percent lower) and for violent crimes (32 percent lower).

⁹ Criminal Recidivism After Prison and Electronic Monitoring – 2013

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2016/03/15-reduce-incarceration-rates-targeted-surveillance-doleac>

http://eesp.fgv.br/sites/eesp.fgv.br/files/file/Ernesto_Schargrodsky.pdf

· Description: Rafael Di Tella and Ernesto Schargrodsky evaluated the effect of EM in Argentina, where it is used even for serious offenders.

· Finding: They found that being randomly assigned to a judge who prefers EM increases the likelihood of receiving EM instead of prison time. Offenders assigned to these judges had lower post-release recidivism rates as a result. Not only does EM reduce the use of incarceration, it actually reduces crime that would have sent individuals back to prison

¹⁰ Monitoring High-Risk Sex Offenders with GPS Technology: An Evaluation of the California Supervision Program, Final Report – March 2012

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/238481.pdf>

· Description: "A National Institute of Justice-sponsored research project examines the impact that GPS monitoring has on the recidivism rates of sex offenders in California."

· Finding: "This study of California high-risk sex offenders on parole found that those placed on GPS monitoring had significantly lower recidivism rates than those who received traditional supervision."

¹¹ CEP Report on the Integration of Probation and Electronic Monitoring – A Continuing Challenge – 2011

Includes links to multiple US and International EM research studies (Renzema, Padgett, etc.)

http://www.antonioacasella.eu/nume/Nellis_may2011.pdf

· Description: Summarization of research on EM programs and discussion of evidence based practices and how EM does or does not play a role.

· Finding: "Appraisal and revision" in respect of EM is largely what the CEP EM conferences have accomplished since their inception in 2001, and one would be hard pressed to say that the results so far have not been good. The worst fears about EM that were harboured by some two decades ago have not come to pass, and the CEP EM conferences has played a part in ensuring that events worked out this way. We do not know everything about best "integrated" practice, but between us we know more than we generally realise. It is only by sustaining the humanistic values, the deep concern for offenders as people – as well as for victims – and for social justice, that probation services have traditionally subscribed to, that we will ensure that surveillance technology serves rather than dominates our approach to supervision. As a side note, one of the points indicated recidivism is highest soon after release and EM at this juncture will lessen recidivism.

¹² A Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment of Electronic Monitoring – 2010

<http://nic.gov/Library/024460>

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/230530.pdf>

· Description: "The purposes of this research include: (1) determining the effect of electronic monitoring (EM) as a supervision enhancement for offenders in terms of absconding, probation violations, and the commission of new crimes..."

· Finding: "The quantitative analysis demonstrates that EM reduces offenders' risk of failure by 31 percent and that global positioning system (GPS) monitoring results in 6 percent fewer supervision failures compared to radio frequency (RF)."

¹³ Under Surveillance: An Empirical Test of the Effectiveness and Consequences of Electronic Monitoring – 2006

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2006.00102>

· Description: "This study addresses the effectiveness of electronic monitoring (EM) for serious offenders supervised in the community."

· Finding: "Using data on 75,661 offenders placed on home confinement in Florida from 1998 to 2002, we find that both radio-frequency and global positioning system monitoring significantly reduce the likelihood of technical violations, reoffending, and absconding for this population of offenders."

¹⁴ Costs & Payment of Expenses Incurred for Location Monitoring

<https://www.uscourts.gov/services-forms/probation-and-pretrial-services/supervision/costs-payment-expenses-incurred-location-monitoring>

¹⁵ Electronic monitoring: Important information for offenders – February 2022

https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/information_brochures/electronic_monitoring_important_information_for_offenders