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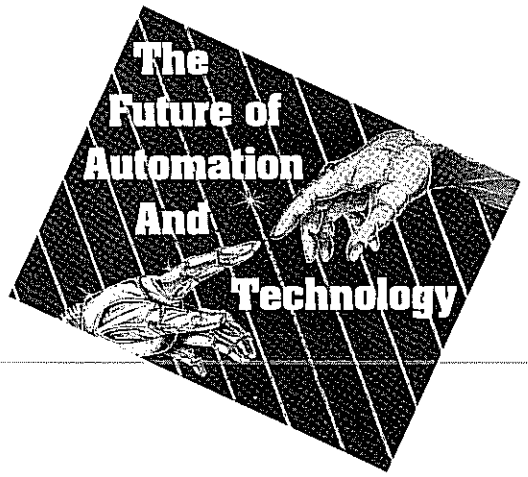
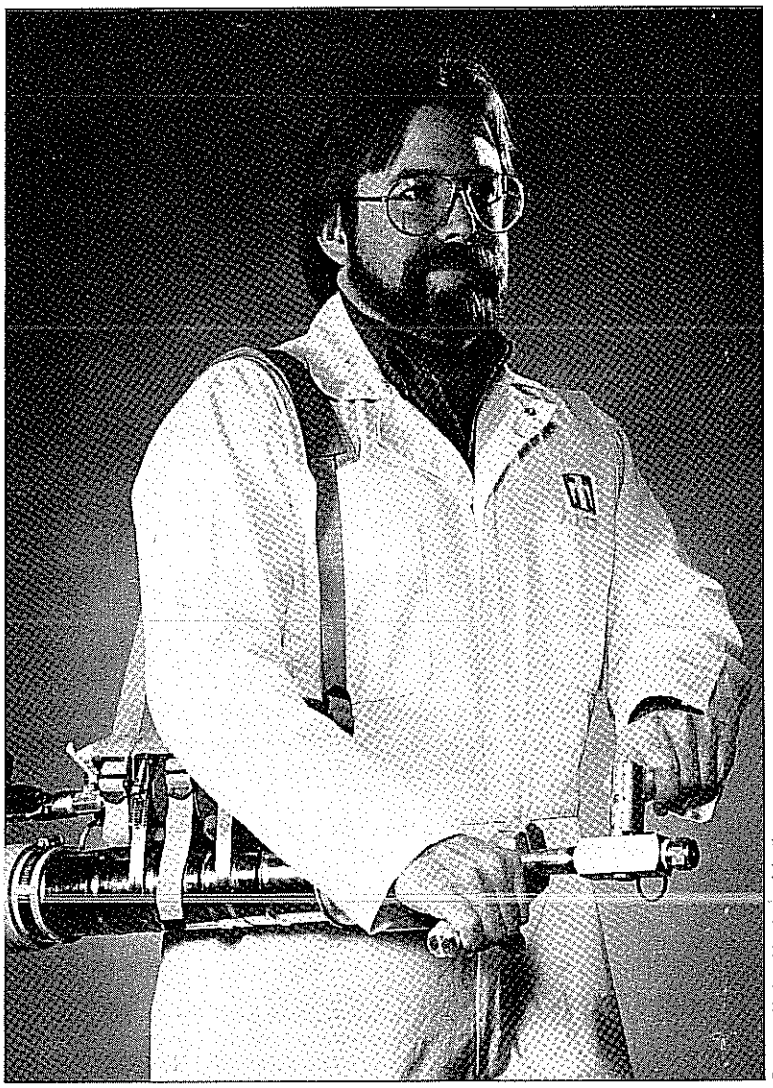


New Council Gives Direction To Technology Development



Courtesy National Institute of Justice

NIJ and NIC have formed a Corrections Technology Council to evaluate and set priorities for developing future correctional technology initiatives, such as this prototype for a sticky foam gun.

by Kevin M. Jackson

In May 1995, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), in cooperation with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), initiated a Corrections Technology Council. Approximately 70 correctional practitioners at the state, local and federal levels are participating on the committee. According to David Boyd, NIJ's director of Science and Technology, this initiative is based on the need to better address correctional priorities and concerns in the area of technology. Boyd believes that "the establishment of a standing corrections council on technology will benefit the corrections field and enable NIJ and NIC to better meet their needs in the area of technology evaluation and applications."

A three-phase initiative, which will not only establish this committee but also will serve to develop a comprehensive needs assessment for technology in corrections, is in progress. The committee will use the needs assessment to provide valid feedback to NIJ and NIC and other correctional entities on correctional needs and requirements for the present and future.

The first phase of the corrections technology initiative is a preliminary technology survey developed by NIC and its information center. The survey was distributed to approximately 200 correctional agencies, with the results serving as a starting point for the comprehensive needs assessment. The survey addressed concerns such as: What different technologies are being used today? How effective are those systems? What are additional technology needs for corrections? Preliminary results will be released at the council's meeting in June.

The second phase of the corrections technology initiative is selecting council members and conducting a two-day meeting. The council is made up of individuals from federal, state and local agencies representing both large and small

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corrections systems and "high-tech" and "low-tech" facilities throughout the nation.

The goals of the first meeting of the council are to:

- identify short- and long-term corrections technology needs and requirements;
- provide input for developing a national data base on corrections technology; and
- decide on the most useful way to establish an information center on technology to support corrections professionals.

The comprehensive needs assessment will provide valid feedback to NIJ and NIC and other correctional entities on correctional needs and requirements for the present and future.

The first meeting of the council is scheduled for June 20-22, 1995, in Charleston, S.C. Charleston was selected because it is the site of NIJ's newly established Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center, which will be responsible, in part, for corrections technology.

The third phase of the initiative will be to develop a comprehensive needs assessment in corrections technology and establish correctional working groups for specific technology initiatives. Although plans have not been finalized, the comprehensive needs assessment probably will take at least six months and will look specifically at the corrections community and address current and future technology needs and recommendations.

Both NIC and NIJ are excited about the potential of these efforts in corrections technology. This initiative will pick up where NIC's 1994 National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) technology project for corrections left off.

In years past, NIC had funded the NASA Technology Project to address corrections needs in the areas of contraband detection, drug use detection, computer literacy and other areas of security. NIJ is assisting NIC in continuing the corrections priorities initiated under the NASA project and will use this council to help determine additional technology needs. NIJ recently has signed a cooperative agreement with NASA and the National Technology Transfer Center in Wheeling, W.Va., which will provide technological support and assistance for furthering technology in law enforcement and corrections.

Kevin M. Jackson, project manager for NIJ's national and regional Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers, previously worked for NIC as NASA technology project director.