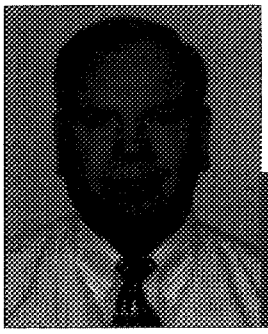

Technology is not the solution to your problems, but it is an invaluable tool in reaching that solution.

Technology: Have Practitioners' Needs Been Met?

By Steve Morrison
Deputy Director of Corrections
National Law Enforcement and Corrections
Technology Center — Southeast

For years, you have all attended countless meetings and conferences or filled out technology surveys in which you were asked to identify correctional technology needs. Did you ever wonder where those suggestions went and if anyone did anything with them? Fortunately, for the past 4 years, I have been in a position to personally see what is being done to meet your identified needs. As a staff member in one of the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ), National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers (NLECTC), I have had the privilege to witness firsthand how your needs and requirements are identified and addressed.

In 1994, NIJ expanded its mission to address the needs of the corrections community. To do this, NIJ established the NLECTC system to help law enforcement and correctional agencies obtain information on new technologies, product testing and standards development. In an attempt to identify the real needs of the corrections community, NIJ funded the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) to gather data that would assess the use of technologies by correctional agencies. In March 1994, the NIC Information Center initiated the project to survey jails, prisons and community corrections agencies. The purpose of the survey was to:

- Gather information on specific technologies being used or tested for adoption;
- Obtain data on how agencies evaluate particular technologies they use or have used;
- Identify areas of correctional practices for which technologies could be developed or improved; and
- Identify issues in the technology adoption process that could be an opportunity to further target the assistance that NIJ will offer correctional agencies.

NIJ established the NLECTC system to help law enforcement and correctional agencies obtain information on new technologies, product testing and standards development.

The survey instrument was distributed to 218 federal, state and local correctional agencies. The research findings were grouped into four categories: technologies with the highest user evaluations; technologies dropped from use; agency suggestions for improving technologies; and unmet technology needs. NLECTC centers use the information contained in these areas to help guide the identification of technologies they should pursue. Survey results identified three main obstacles that inhibit the exploration and adoption of new technologies:

- A lack of available funds;
- Insufficient staff resources to explore technology options; and
- A lack of information on available technologies.

NIJ looked at these inhibitors and, coupling them with the survey results identifying the unmet needs in corrections technology, tried to address each one individually. The lack of available funds was and still is the major inhibitor. However, NIJ has been successful through its technology grant program in providing funding for new and emerging technologies for qualifying agencies. The last two inhibitors can best be resolved by using the Justice Technology Information Network (JUSTNET). JUSTNET is NIJ's Web site for publicizing services and assistance; technology projects; technology databases; publications; grants; news summaries; other corrections links; and topic boards through which practitioners can ask questions or request assistance. It was developed to help agencies explore the Internet for technology options and to provide detailed information on available technologies to practitioners.

While I don't have enough room in this article to list all the correctional

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Commentary

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projects and programs NIJ has under way, nearly all of the areas identified in the NIC survey are being addressed. Many of the projects are geared toward providing a product at little or no cost to the practitioner. All of these projects are funded by NIJ:

- **Corrections Vendor Database:** Accessible through JUSTNET via the Internet. Provides vendor product/service information, descriptions, hyperlink to vendor Web site, testing and evaluation information on products, and at least five correctional agencies currently using the product with the agency name, point of contact and telephone number. This service is password-protected and will be free to vendors and practitioners. It should be online this month.

- **Vital Signs Monitoring:** NIJ is conducting a study to identify current state-of-the-art and emerging technologies capable of providing and transmitting emergency warnings in the event of critical combinations of vital signs. The system should be capable of monitoring restrained or unrestrained individuals.

- **Medical and Pharmaceutical Information System (MAPIS):** MAPIS uses smart cards to issue medication and track medical treatment for inmates. The smart card is a credit card-size identification card with three information media: bar code, magnetic stripe and an 8-kilobytes computerchip. The inmate's entire medical record is stored on the computer chip and is displayed on the computer screen when read.

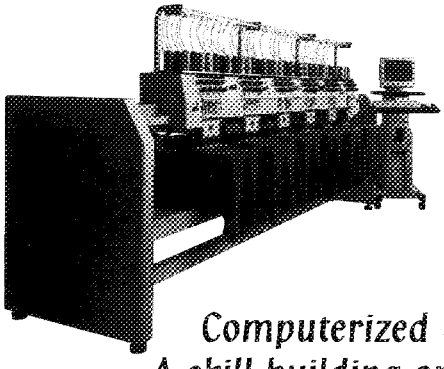
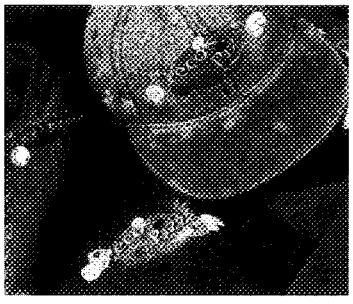
- **Personal Alarm Monitor (PAM):** PAM is being developed in a cooperative agreement with a vendor and in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. It is an individual personal distress alarm coupled with a locator system. The system uses radio frequency tags and sensors to provide an accurate location of an officer within a correctional facility and surrounding work areas. This system requires no costly retrofitting, conduits or wire pulls. This system can distinguish between tiers and stairwells to accurately locate an officer.

- **South Carolina Jail Linkage System:** In partnership with the University of South Carolina and the South Carolina Sheriff's Association, an Internet-based information-sharing system has been developed that provides real-time data on inmates in all phases of the criminal justice system. The system also provides all the records from the Department of Motor Vehicles for cross-referencing for verification of identification. Public domain information is provided but sensitive information can be flagged.

- **Jail-Based Telemedicine:** NIJ has funded a study to evaluate telemedicine technology applications to provide mental health services to jails. Three test bed sites have been identified with one currently fully operational. NLECTC-Southeast (SE) will perform an impact assessment quantifying cost benefits and develop a model for other agencies to follow. The objective is to produce a very affordable system.

- **Vulnerability Assessment (VA):** NIJ and Sandia National Labs are developing analytical software based on a program used by the government to protect nuclear weapons and sites. The software will analyze construction and security data to provide a probability entry and exit in a prison or jail. A VA guideline has been developed by Sandia and is available through the NLECTC Center system.

- **Non-Invasive Drug Detection:** NIJ has funded the Oak Ridge National Labs to conduct initial data collection in support of a

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scientific notion that chemical compounds can be detected in the body oil secretions left behind by fingerprints. A feasibility study is scheduled to be completed in 4 months.

- **Lessons Learned Information System**: NLECTC-SE and Oak Ridge National Labs are developing a system with which prison and jail officials can monitor and research specific events, such as suicides and escapes, via the Internet. The system would be password-protected and free of charge to the practitioner through JUSTNET.

I challenge you to look back 4 years to the time you answered the NIC survey or made recommendations at correctional conferences or meetings and compare the technology projects completed or under development by NIJ, the American Correctional Association (ACA), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) or the American Jail Association (AJA) and see if we have provided what you required at the time. Of course, not all your requirements can be funded but they have been, and will continue to be, addressed by NIJ and all the agencies that provide us with active support. Should you have a need or requirement that has not been addressed, feel free to attend the ACA Technology Committee meeting at the Summer Congress in Denver and make that requirement known. ACA, AJA, APPA and the NIJ Technology Center system are there to serve you and provide you with support on all technology issues.

Technology is a wonderful tool. However, technology is not the solution to your problems, but it is an invaluable tool in reaching that solution. In order to help you with your technology needs and concerns, we have to know about them. Voice your problems to your regional NLECTC, ACA, AJA or your state correctional association and let us provide you with credible information and assistance on your technology needs.

Steve Morrison can be contacted at 1-800-292-4385. Copies of the 1995 NIC survey, Technology Issues in Corrections Agencies, *are available from NIC.*

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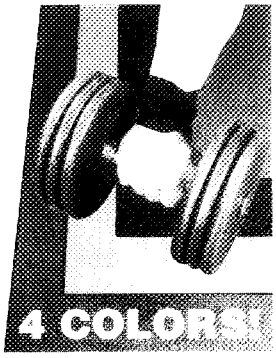

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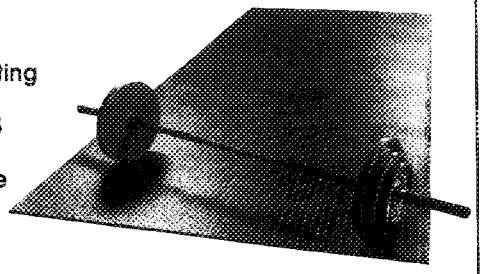

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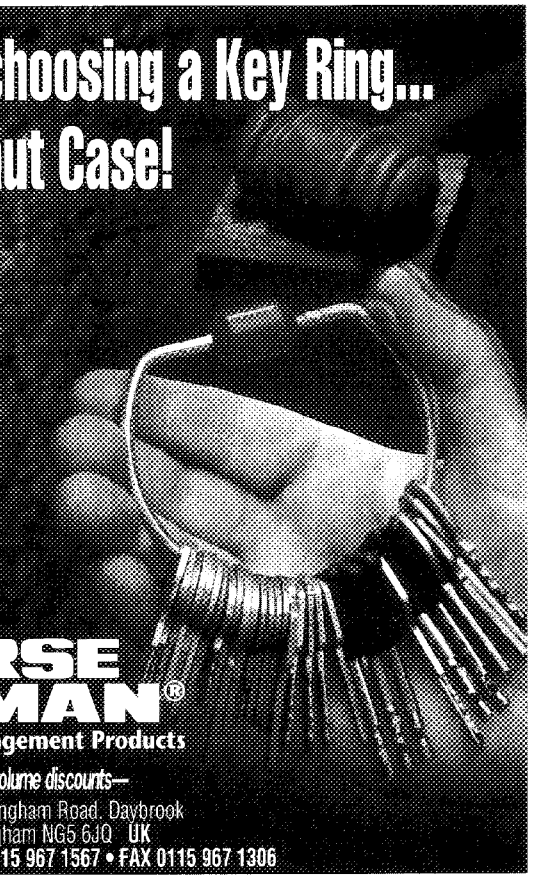

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