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Collaborative Innovations Will Lead Corrections Into the Future

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In looking back at previous Security and Technology issues of *Corrections Today (CT)*, I was struck by a reoccurring theme. What continued to resonate with me as I researched this topic was how much things have changed during my tenure in the business of technology and product development for use in the corrections environment. However, on the other hand, some factors have remained relatively constant throughout the years.

From my perspective, the one factor that appears to be a constant is the "human" factor. Debbie Mahaffey wrote about this in her July 2004 *CT* article, "Security and Technology — The Human Side." As Mahaffey pointed out in her commentary, "technology is only as good as the people using it."

With a reasonable degree of assurance, we could say that the introduction of new technology into the institutional and community corrections environments is only going to be as good as the engineers and scientists working to develop solutions to the issues confronting corrections managers. It is also critical that researchers work closely with corrections professionals, through periodic reviews, testing and evaluation, to develop products that meet the industry's needs.

In order for corrections to be the beneficiary of the latest technological advancements, the men and women in our research facilities need to be able to understand the operational needs within the corrections environment and be able to apply the most current technologies in a manner that has utility for the end user. In many situations the end user will be a corrections or probation officer.

For this to be a win-win situation for both the scientists as well as the corrections professionals, the operational need must be articulated in a way that can be understood by a scientist who may not know the operating environment in which his or her product or technology will be used. For example, the relatively recent situation of contraband cell phones being smuggled into corrections facilities and used by inmates for any number of illegal activities has prompted collaboration to develop sophisticated technology. To combat this criminal activity, the Bureau of Prisons, the National Institute of Justice and the Naval Surface Warfare Center-Dahlgren (SPAWAR) have teamed up to collaborate in finding a solution to this national — possibly international problem.

In the Winter 2005 edition of NLECTC's *Techbeat* there is an article titled "No More 'Cell' Phones," which examines the problem and identifies the different applications of technologies that are currently being considered and tested to defeat the illicit use of cell phones by inmates.

Another example of applied research being used to combat a serious problem within the corrections environment is the application of physics to improve the safety of scientists at the Applied Physics Laboratory at Johns Hopkins University are putting their collective minds together to develop personal toiletry items that cannot be converted into weapons. They have created a unique two-layer design for personal toiletry items. The inner core of the toiletry item is of a stiff resin core and the outer layer is a softer urethane shell. The development of this unique design has resulted is a prototype toothbrush and razor that cannot be sharpened or melted into a weapon, thereby reducing the threat to a correctional officer or another inmate.

As a national program whose mission is "to assist in the commercialization of innovative technology for use by the law enforcement and corrections community," the Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization works with the inventors, researchers, product developers and manufacturers to do what it can to ensure that the byproduct of good science and technology has the opportunity to make it through the innovation process and ultimately into products that will serve the best interest of corrections professionals. The more options that corrections professionals have when confronted with a purchasing decision, the better we have served the interest of the corrections community.

These are just a few examples where advanced science and technology has been used to address the challenges confronting our men and women in corrections. As Alexander Fox pointed out in his commentary in the July 2003 issue of *CT*, "As corrections professionals, we have much expertise to offer the private sector. As security system experts, they have much to offer us. Exploring and adapting technologies that are not traditional to corrections is one of the many ways to effectively manage facilities and augment our existing security systems."◆

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