

NEWSRELEASE

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Corrections begins use of new alert notification system

HELENA – The Montana Department of Corrections on Monday launched a demonstration project using computer technology to improve the process of alerting department and other key state officials of major incidents at correctional facilities throughout Montana.

The CHAIN program, developed by Missoula-based Invizeon Corp., automates the notification network that previously relied on a series of phone calls placed by officers in the command post at Montana State Prison. If the demonstration project is successful, state officials will decide whether to solicit proposals for possible purchase of a permanent alert notification system. The system has been in a test phase for the past six weeks.

The system will be used only for “priority one” incidents, which include an escape, death, power outage, suicide, assault, riot, hostage situation or sabotage, according to David Skilling, executive vice president of client services for Invizeon.

Under the old system, a report of an incident would be called into to the command post, where staff would start making phone calls to top corrections officials and key members of the governor’s office staff. The process could handle 40 notifications, usually to a single phone number for each official.

The CHAIN system is capable of transmitting a notification to thousands of recipients, depending on the type of incident involved. It also allows for expansion to include alerts issued to local law enforcement agencies, other state agencies and even to neighbors of a correctional facility where an incident occurred.

When a call comes into the command post using the CHAIN system, an officer collects details of an incident, logs into the network, inserts the information into a template and issues the alert. The notice can be sent by several routes to officials: email, work and personal cell phones, office phone and home phone. Recipients must acknowledge they have received the message, a feature that allows officials to determine who and when people were notified, Skilling explained. The system repeats the notification to an individual until receipt is confirmed.

“There’s a complete tracking of every incident,” he said, noting that CHAIN saves valuable time. What has taken hours to accomplish through manual dialing of phone numbers can be accomplished in minutes, he said.

“This is needed by the Department of Corrections for improving communication,” Skilling said. “Whenever an incident occurred before, there was always somebody who doesn’t get notified. This makes sure all the appropriate people are notified.”

Mike Mahoney, warden at Montana State Prison, praised the innovation.

“This system will enable command post staff to spend more time resolving issues in lieu of tracking down the appropriate administrators to ensure the incident is properly reported in a timely manner,” he said. “CHAIN will take care of the notifications and free up our shift commanders to focus on the more critical matters. This system will represent a significant improvement in our overall management of critical events.”

Bill Fleiner, chief of the Investigation and Compliance Monitoring Bureau in the Montana Corrections Department, called the new system a major improvement in emergency notification abilities of the agency.

“I very much appreciate the time Invizeon has taken to work with the number of people they have had to train to bring this system into fruition,” he said. “They have gone to great lengths to prepare the department and our contacts that we have identified as necessary to be informed of events in the Department of Corrections.”

Skilling said Invizeon already provides a similar notification system to the U.S. Navy and a large multinational organization, and is talking with corrections officials in several states about installing the CHAIN program.

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