

# NEWSRELEASE

Montana Department of Corrections • 1539 11th Avenue

Helena, Montana 59620 • 444-3930 • Fax: 444-4920



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CONTACT: Lisa Grady, 444-4938; Kimberly Timm, 444-4903

## Corrections offers online payment of restitution, supervision fees

HELENA – The cash register on the Montana Department of Corrections Web site is more than a symbol of money. It rings up financial justice.

Since last fall, the icon has provided Montana offenders with an easy way to pay court-ordered restitution to the victims of their crimes and to pay a share of their community supervision costs.

The online service has been a resounding success in its first eight full months. The number of credit- or debit-card transactions has increased from 14 in the opening month to 135 in April, and the monthly payments have nearly tripled in that time from about \$5,900 to \$16,600 .

“We never anticipated it would get this large,” said Lisa Grady, collections manager for the department. “We figured a few offenders would make payments with credit cards.”

The idea was born when an offender asked department officials if he could use his credit card to pay off the full amount of his \$5,000 restitution in a lump sum rather than in the usual installment payments over time.

Grady, who heads the five-employee unit responsible for collecting restitution payments and supervision fees, said the benefit of such an arrangement was obvious.

“It’s definitely a bonus for the victims because they get all their money right away,” and the offender is responsible for paying his or her own credit card bill, she said.

Often, offenders’ relatives will use their credit cards to make the payments. Each payment requires an additional transaction fee.

Before the new online feature, the only option for offender payment was mailing a cashier’s check or money order to the department.

The department has been responsible for collecting restitution payments since October 2003 when a law change removed the duty from district courts. The law requires a 10 percent fee to cover the costs of managing the program.

In October 2005, corrections took over from the clerks of District Court the collection of fees from offenders for their community supervision. Supervision fees are used to offset costs for probation and parole officers’ training and safety equipment. Twenty percent of all supervision fees collected is used to pay administrative costs of the collection unit.

The department has thus far distributed \$4.8 million directly to victims owed restitution and another \$215,450 in supervision fees. The amount of restitution collected has grown by about 16 percent annually since the agency took over the job. Collections are expected to be \$2.5 million this year and rise to nearly \$4 million in 2009.

The department manages almost 16,000 accounts involving collection of supervision fees or restitution.

The Internet site can be reached with two addresses: [www.cor.mt.gov](http://www.cor.mt.gov) or <https://app.mt.gov/cashier>. Offenders or victims can obtain more information by calling 1-800-801-3478.

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