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## County Jails Deploy Whole-Body Scanners to Detect Hidden Weapons or Contraband



April 27, 2011 By *Elaine Pittman*

Strip searches conducted at jails and correctional facilities are being revolutionized — and the “strip” portion is being dropped altogether. In a traditional strip search, offenders remove all of their clothing and officers of the same sex verify that the person isn't smuggling weapons or other types of contraband, like

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Full-body scanners can spot minute amounts of contraband material. In this image, the scanner detected wire entwined in an inmate's hair and drugs concealed in his socks. Photo courtesy of Collier County, Fla., Sheriff's Office.

drugs, into the facility.

The 21st-century search, however, uses new full-body scanning technology that detects contraband hidden inside and on an offender's body in about seven seconds — while requiring that they remove only their shoes.

Full-body scanners have been in use for years by airports and corrections departments to search for metal concealed on individuals, but an emerging technology enhances body scans by identifying

metallic and organic materials.

In March, the Collier County, Fla., Sheriff's Office began using a new scanner to prevent offenders from smuggling drugs into the jail. "People are putting prescription narcotics in their body cavities, and it's a very difficult thing to locate with just a traditional strip search," said Capt. Beth Richards.

In Florida, body cavity searches require a court order, she said, so the Sheriff's Office was interested when it learned about a tool that automatically detects hidden drugs and weapons. The RadPro SecurPass, manufactured by Canon U.S.A. Inc., uses transmission imaging to conduct a virtual body scan. The inmate stands on an automated platform that moves him or her through the machine, which scans the body with a one mm-thick radiation beam, according to Dennis Wolfe, national sales manager of security products for Virtual Imaging Inc., a Canon subsidiary.

As the beam passes through the inmate's body, and the system measures how much density is left in the beam. The information is then processed and relayed to a computer that reconstructs the image. Officers operating the system study the rendering of the inmate to see if anything looks out of place.

"It's like you're looking at an X-ray," Richards said. "You're looking straight through their body, so if there's something there that normally wouldn't be in your body, that God didn't give you, it jumps out at you."

Richards said the system shows officers something as minute as a filling in someone's tooth. If an officer sees something that looks suspicious, the inmate is strip-searched to determine what the object is.

Although the system scans a person's entire body inside and out, it doesn't show as much soft tissue detail as the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) scanners. So inmates' privacy is protected because facial features aren't shown.

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## Changing Processes

About 30 people are booked into the Collier County jail every day, but not every person is scanned. Florida state statute says that a person must meet certain criteria to be strip searched, and the machine is considered a virtual strip search. For example, people arrested for a traffic, regulatory or misdemeanor offense won't be strip searched unless the incident involved a weapon, controlled substance or a judge says the person can't be released on recognizance or bond.

After inmates arrive at the jail, they're processed and scanned if deemed necessary. Inmates also are scanned after making contact with the public — for example, after a doctor's appointment, work duty or meeting with an attorney.

Scanning takes about seven seconds, compared to a standard strip search that takes about 15 minutes. "Physically you can only strip search a limited amount of inmates coming through on a daily basis because of the time it takes and the intrusive nature of a strip search," Richards said, "but the scanner is not intrusive; you don't have to disrobe."

Collier County jail went from performing an average of 10 strip searches per day to 30 or 40 per day with the scanner.

## Increased Clarity

About 1,300 miles away in Illinois, the Cook County Jail is using the same technology after replacing its body scanning machines from L-3 Communications that have been in place since 2008. As of March, four RadPro SecurPass machines were in operation at the jail, which averages a population of 9,000 inmates. "It gives us a much better analysis of body cavities with much more clarity than we were able to get with the L-3s," said Sheriff Thomas J. Dart.

When Dart took office about five years ago, he replaced strip searches with scanners because he found them to be more effective. "It wasn't as if the strip searches were mistake-proof," he said. But Dart also didn't want to compromise security by doing fewer searches.

The L-3 machines almost eliminated any metal entering the jail, while also reducing the amount of narcotics on the premises, according to Dart. "But this machine takes it to the next level where it's difficult to imagine anything getting in," he said.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office purchased the four RadPro machines for \$940,500. Two scanners are located in the receiving area and scan everyone entering the jail, while the two maximum-security divisions each have a scanner to search inmates as they migrate internally.

## A New Tool

Before operating the machine, officers in Cook and Collier counties completed instructional and field training. Richards said one section of Collier County's training discusses the radiation part of the imaging and how it works. Questions have been raised about the amount of radiation inmates are exposed to, she said, but that it is a very small quantity — the radiation in one chest X-ray is equal to being scanned about 400 times in the SecurPass, according to the county's website.

Field training allows officers to get accustomed to the technology, and Richards said it takes about 20 minutes to learn how to run the machine. Learning what to look for on the machine's screen, however, takes practice. "The more you run the scanner and look at the films, the better you are at finding things," Richards said. "The scanner is only as good as the operator, because if whoever is looking at the film doesn't see that something looks odd, then that contraband goes undetected."

Since enlisting the machines to help with searches, both counties have found less contraband on inmates. "Word has apparently gotten out through the grapevine that these machines catch it all or you're not getting through," Dart said. "We're finding so many pieces of metal and narcotics that are being dumped in the hallways."

Collier County officers also run inmates' mattresses, linens, shoes and other items through the scanner to look for hidden contraband. Richards said this has increased the jail's search capabilities and also saves money. Mattresses with holes were once discarded, but are now saved and scanned to make sure that nothing is stashed in them.

Although the Sheriff's Office has benefited from the scanner because it's helping to create a safer environment, Richards said people must remember that it's still just a tool. "It doesn't necessarily replace a pat-down or a strip search, but it definitely increases your quality of search and the quantity of searches you can do in a day."

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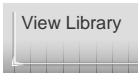


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