



Posted on Sat, Dec. 20, 2008

## Prisons seek to jam cell phone signals

By TONY RIZZO  
The Kansas City Star

The dog crate got all the publicity.

But it was a cell phone smuggled by an accomplice that helped convicted killer John Manard plan his escape from a Kansas prison in 2006.

And the next year, when two inmates broke out of another Kansas prison with the help of a former guard, a smuggled cell phone proved instrumental in plotting the breakout.

Those cases illustrate a growing problem faced by correctional facilities across the country.

Some officials now want federal rules changed to allow them to jam cell phone signals within their institutions.

"I don't think there is a correctional facility in the country that hasn't been dealing with this issue," said Bill Miskell, spokesman for the Kansas Department of Corrections.

Cell phones also have been used by prison inmates in other states to arrange drug deals, kidnappings and even murders.

"There is a reason we have very controlled inmate access to telephones," Miskell said.

Prisons and jails provide telephone access to prisoners through landlines, which typically can be used only to call collect to approved people. Those calls are subject to monitoring and recording.

But with the proliferation of cell phones in society, more are reaching the hands of incarcerated criminals.

In 2008 alone, South Carolina prison officials confiscated 1,800 cell phones or components. Even metal detectors and X-ray machines did not stop them from being smuggled into prisons.

Some phones have been heaved over prison fences, including in one incident where someone threw a football stuffed with phones into the prison yard, said Josh Gelinis, communications director for the South Carolina Department of Corrections.

Officials in other states confiscate hundreds of illegally smuggled cell phones every year, said George Camp, co-executive director of the Association of State Correctional Administrators.

"It is a major problem throughout the country," said Camp, a former director of the Missouri Department of Corrections. "Unquestionably we are seeing more of it."

Camp said his organization is "actively and aggressively" mobilizing its members to push the Federal Communications Commission to change current regulations that prohibit the use of technology to jam cell phone signals in state prisons. They are also preparing to lobby members of Congress if a change in law is needed.

"They (cell phones) can be sources of great danger to staff and the public at large, as well as other inmates," Camp said.

Such readily available jamming technology recently was demonstrated for prison officials in South Carolina, he said.

"It far exceeded our expectations," he said. "They showed the ability to pinpoint what was jammed and not affect anything outside the prison."

Howard Melamed, whose company conducted the South Carolina demonstration, said he is seeing more and more interest from prison officials, not just in this country, but worldwide.

Correctional officials in Texas and Washington, D.C., have scheduled demonstrations, said Melamed, president and CEO of CellAntenna Corp.

Melamed said allowing prisons to jam cell phone usage by inmates is a common-sense solution that would cost about \$100,000 for a 1,000-inmate institution.

He calls it “surgically controlled” jamming that affects only the reception of phones within a specific area and not the towers where signals come from.

The system could be set up to jam only certain areas within a facility, such as living quarters or recreation areas, without interfering with frequencies used by prison staff, he said.

“I don’t see how it can be in the best interest of the public to have criminals behind bars using cell phones,” Melamed said.

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To reach Tony Rizzo, call 816-234-4435 or send e-mail to [trizzo@kcstar.com](mailto:trizzo@kcstar.com).

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