

# Breathalyzer kiosk touted as game changer for authorities, parolees

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Law enforcement authorities in the county seat of Thief River Falls,

Minn., this month installed an electronic kiosk that can accurately measure for alcohol.

It's a low-cost move that they, and court officials in 10 Wisconsin counties since 2018, believe will help them free sheriff's deputies and probation officers from daily checks of low-level offenders.

Next month, one of Indiana's largest counties will start installing at several sites the first of 10 electronic kiosks made by Precision Kiosk Technologies (PKT) of Edina, Minn.

If this promising technology continues to progress, this could be a significant development for both court authorities and parolees.

They often must spend too much time daily, away from jobs or families, waiting to be tested by a sheriff's deputy or probation officer.

"The advantage is it frees up staff time by using the machine-breathalyzer," said Andrea Behnke, justice program director in Portage County, one of the Wisconsin counties that has conducted more than 70,000 breathalyzer screening tests since January 2018.

"The machine has always worked. And if we have a suggestion for a change, Precision has looked into it. They've been wonderful."

It also costs the county virtually nothing.

The promising electronic technology almost didn't come to fruition.

A few years ago, Precision, now with a growing staff of 10, was a tiny outfit that was trying to get saloons and restaurants to lease the technology to test patrons so they would know when to bum a ride or take a cab instead of driving.

"Candidly, bars don't sell sobriety," quipped Patrick McKinney, a veteran Twin Cities engineer and technology manager who was hired in 2017 to find a market and upgrade the product.

McKinney was well aware that Minnesota, with more than 5,000 felons on probation, many also being treated for alcohol addiction, and other states, were swamped by folks who need to be tested daily as a condition of parole from prison or being sentenced to probation.

There is a movement underway in Minnesota and elsewhere to reserve expensive prison space, which costs \$40,000-plus annually in Minnesota per inmate, for dangerous offenders.

But [probation officers](#) have caseloads of up to 120 former inmates and probationers.

Moreover, those who are out on parole or probation, also have jobs and families and other responsibilities.

The "Automated Breathalyzer (AB) Kiosk" is designed to be a low-cost tool for authorities that allows low-risk offenders to take an automated test that takes about a minute once or twice a day at their convenience, instead of waiting up to hours for a human-administered test at a county jail or elsewhere.

They leave with a paper receipt that also proves they showed up and checked in.

"A deputy or probation officer doesn't need to be there at all," said McKinney, 58. "We worked throughout 2017 on improving the methodology so that a client could take a complete test in less than a minute. We listened to (prospective) customers, sheriffs and clients, and brought together a product that met all the needs.

"If a client blows 'hot,' the kiosk provides telephone and text messages instantly (to the authorities)."

PKT charges about \$3 a test, on average, that is paid by the client.

That amount is less than the client would be charged daily for just toiletries, snacks and telephone privileges behind bars.

The kiosk also reminds the client to appear by text and e-mail, uses biometric fingerprint authentication, takes still pictures and video as it administers a [test](#), alerts authorities to failed tests, tests up to 40 an hour and produces summary reports.

It is also cheaper than the \$15 to \$20 a day it costs to wear electronic bracelets that reveal location and detect alcohol or other drugs.

"We've been able to take the kiosk, and with a simple pivot, retool it, add new capability that includes the automated 'probation check-in,?'" McKinney said. "It takes a burden off the court system. And the client doesn't have to go to the courthouse."

When an Indiana state court judge from an unspecified county of about 500,000 residents heard about the AB Kiosk at a Florida conference in April, she alerted law enforcement colleagues.

The installation of 10 machines over several months will begin in Indiana next month. It's PKT's single-biggest installation.

McKinney also plans to pitch the kiosk to counties and municipalities, including Minneapolis, that are considering dropping bail for those charged with certain misdemeanors. Instead of a social worker, they could just show up daily and check in at a [kiosk](#) to prove they haven't left town in advance of a court hearing.

McKinney, who said private investors have staked several million in PKT, said the company will generate positive cash flow when it hits 35 installed machines. That should be soon.

"We're putting out 15 or 16 (just) in the next few weeks," said McKinney.

The equipment is made by RiverStar manufacturing of Winona, Minn.

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