



Trooper Trap

Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization (OLETC)

Executive Summary by Kara Grey

It is one of the worst possible scenarios a patrol officer can face: an escaped suspect. With nothing to lose, desperate criminals will stop at nothing to avoid prosecution or a return to incarceration – even stealing the car. At the very least, an escape means a great deal of time and expense in apprehending the suspect.

It happened to Oklahoma Highway Patrolman Alan Beaty on October 26, 2000 when he stopped a female motorist for running a stop sign. A background check revealed that she was driving under suspension, with outstanding warrants for her arrest. Beaty cuffed her and put her in the front seat of his patrol unit.

"I handcuffed her behind her back, put her in the car, and seat belted her in," Beaty said. "While I was doing an inventory of the pickup, I hear tires squealing as she takes off in my car."

The suspect sped away in Beaty's brand new patrol unit, which was only three weeks old. During the ensuing chase, the suspect lost control of the car on the interstate and crashed the unit.

Escapes: An Everyday Event

Escapes such as the one Beaty experienced are, quite literally, an everyday occurrence in the United States. A total of 315 patrol unit es-



capas reportedly took place during 2004. Aside from the risk of losing the vehicle, escapes pose a significant risk of injury or death to the officer, the general public and the escapee.

"Every time a suspect escapes, they are desperate," Beaty said. "They're going to do everything they can to keep from getting caught. This puts the public in extreme danger of kidnapping, home invasion or car jacking by a desperate criminal."

Beaty notes that escapes are equally as dangerous for the detainee, citing an example from Texas where a 17-year-old juvenile escaped a patrol car, ran across a busy highway, was struck by a passing car and killed.

"As soon as you detain a suspect, they are

your responsibility," Beaty said. "They might not be under arrest, but they are no longer really free to leave. You are responsible for their safety. You have to guarantee that."

For Beaty, guaranteeing the safety of a detainee means always using a seatbelt, even for situations in which a suspect is not being arrested.

This protects the detainee – and protects the officer and his department from a potential lawsuit if something should go wrong.

Even if no one is seriously injured or killed, escapes can be very costly. With the average cost of a new patrol unit exceeding \$30,000, a stolen car can mean a significant loss for any department, not to mention the potential

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damages caused by detainees who simply kick out the windows and doors.

Add to this the cost of extra manpower and resources to apprehend the escapee and the price tag really adds up – not to mention the cost of additional incarceration imposed due to the escape attempt.

The Ticket is to Click It

Beaty was determined that an escape would not happen to him again. He would find a way to prevent escapes from his patrol unit.

“The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the only way to get out of that car, or do anything, is to unbuckle the seatbelt,” Beaty said.

He knew that without first removing the seatbelt, it would be virtually impossible for a detainee to escape, attack the officer, jump through the cage into the front seat, or even kick out a window.

Beaty theorized that if the seatbelt in his patrol unit could be outfitted with an alarm, this would alert him the second a detainee attempts to make a move.

Toiling away in his garage, Beaty invented Trooper Trap: a seatbelt alarm that can be used to ensure the security of detainees, suspects and prisoners, as well as the safety of the officers charged with detaining or transporting them.

Taking the Next Step

Searching for assistance in commercializing his invention, Beaty contacted the Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization (OLETC), a program of the National Institute of Justice. Project manager Tom McLaughlin invited Beaty to attend an OLETC Commercialization Planning Workshop® (CPW®) in November 2002.

“I’m sitting in a class with all these people, and I’m thinking ‘I’m in the wrong place.’ There were people there with scanners to scan your face for drugs, alcohol and facial recognition. One guy had a card that pops into a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) that is basically a

cellular tower condensed into a little card.

Another woman had photo enhancement software from MIT,” Beaty said. “And I’ve got this little relay that sets off a horn when someone unbuckles a seatbelt.”

But the experts at OLETC, who specialize in providing the resources to assist with the commercialization of technology for use in the law enforcement and corrections industries, convinced Beaty that he was right where he belonged.

“They told me that I had a device that was functional and could get to market,” Beaty recalled. “By the time the CPW® was over, my alarm was drawing attention because it was functional and it could go to market right now.”

OLETC’s CPW® is an intensive workshop that walks technologists through the commercialization process step by step.

Beaty said the feedback he gained from working with OLETC provided him with a tremendous amount of information, most of it drawn from personal experience.

“So many of the folks at OLETC have experience as police chiefs – and also in talking with others in the industry,” Beaty said. “They are valuable sources of information, research and data, and I’ve drawn on their resources many times. I know they’re there to assist me with information when I need them.”

Building a Better Trooper Trap

Partnering with Surface Mount Depot in Oklahoma City to manufacture the device, Beaty was able to turn his idea into a reality.

Each Trooper Trap unit comes with operating and installation instructions and is about as simple to install as a car stereo. Installation typically takes less than 30 minutes.

The method of alarm is at the officer’s discretion – it can be configured to activate the siren, car horn, existing car alarm, or just lights, either on the car or the light bar.

It can also be set up to work with the on-board camera system or Global Positioning Satellite device.

One of the greatest advantages of Trooper Trap may be its cost. At only \$300 per unit, Beaty says Trooper Trap is like having a full-time employee whose sole job is to guard detainees.

“Budgets don’t allow for enough officers to have one to always guard the prisoner,” Beaty said. “Having this device is just paying someone to watch the prisoner and honk the horn if he unbuckles his seatbelt. Trooper Trap does the same thing, only you don’t have to pay benefits, it doesn’t take sick days or vacation and will never ask for a pay raise.”

Interest in Trooper Trap is growing, and right now there are numerous departments across the country that are testing the device in their patrol units. Surface Mount Depot is also working with several patrol car dealerships to incorporate Trooper Trap as an option, including Philpott Ford in Nederland, Texas – one of the largest fleet dealers in the country.

“If you’re buying a new car, which runs around \$30,000, we’re talking less than a one percent investment to incorporate this technology into the new vehicle,” said Zack Keas of Surface Mount Depot. “Why not make the device part of a new vehicle when it arrives, and protect the overall investment in the patrol unit?”

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For more information about Trooper Trap, visit www.troopertrap.com. The website not only features product details, but also provides a wealth of information about available grants to help fund the purchase of the device, installation tips, and numerous examples of preventable escapes from all across the country.

For more information about Surface Mount Depot, which manufactures the device, visit www.smd-okc.com or call 800-405-8763.

For more information about OLETC, visit www.oletc.org or call 888-306-5382.