

# TRACKING DEVICES

Story by Mary Blankenship Howe

The precious things that could be taken from your life can now be found with various tracking technologies. Current technology in tracking devices have broadened and become more assessable to the public. The consumer has many choices in purchasing product brand and form.

Today's tracking devices can be used to track anyone or anything. The (GPS) Global Positioning System along with radio, cellular, and Internet technology have expanded the resources.

Today, some of the more commercial uses of location information today is the tracking of humans, pets, cars, valuable property, prisoners, and golf carts. The future holds endless possibilities to retrieve such information for research, recreation, security, work, etc....

Tracking devices are becoming solutions

to serious problems that could arise. What if your son or daughter was missing? The KidTrack satellite tracking bracelet offers a solution. The GlobalTrack International Corporation supplies the KidTrak device in a packaging that is child friendly. It's made for ages 8 on up and within a few months, KidTrak will become available for toddlers. It varies in color options and contains a built-in locking mechanism with accessibility only to the key holder.

The bracelets are constructed of strong plastic that surrounds tamper resistant wiring. KidTrak offers features like a watch and play/record options, for verbal instant reminders. The KidTrack bracelet will activate an alert to the Command Center and police authorities will be sent to the location where it was tampered with, cut off or removed improperly. Also, it can be tracked anytime while the child is still wearing this

device, and acts as a visible deterrent to those who know of it.

Helen Tabios, a mother of a two year-old girl, hadn't fathomed the idea that a child tracking device even existed.

*"I teach my daughter to look at me for an (OK) to leave my side, talk to people, or go play. I teach her this for safety, but now that I know these devices are going to be available, I would give it more thought. Nowadays anything helps to find a child."*

Helen recalls being at the park several times when her child left her sight range. Her adrenaline was pumping and her heart pounding from fear. It was only for a few seconds, but that's all it takes for someone to abduct a child.

Helen's daughter was there playing but, she says, "Those few seconds that I can't see my girl just kills me. So many horrible things cross my mind while I scatter to find her. For that reason and feeling, I would think about buying a wrist device for my daughter."

The owners of pets are buying similar units for their loved ones. Pets are considered part of a family household to many and people want to protect them as such. When a pet is lost or stolen, the idea that it may be harmed or killed is a realistic fear. They could be subjected to freezing temperatures, hunger or injury.

Locating these wandering animals before they are harmed becomes quicker and easier with a tracking collar. The Harris Corporation, a pure communications equipment company, provides Micro-Trax, tracking and location systems. The collar with a miniature tracking device, worn by pets, is one of the many products they devise. It's affordable and gives the pet owners peace of mind. When wearing the tracking collar, an animal who wanders off, can be pinpointed with up to date location data and continuous tracking. But, what if the collar is taken off?

*"I think it's a good idea to have tracking devices on animals as long as the owners don't rely on it. Voice command and the proper amount of attention are always going to be the best way to keep track of ones pet," says Gerry Jon, dog walker for Blue Collar Pet Services.*

Another service useful in recovering a lost pet is the implanted microchip. In March 2000, the California SPCA made an aggressive step to insure the safety of animals ready for adoption by having all cats and dogs that go through their system microchipped. This device can't be taken off like a collar. Its placed underneath the skin and is relatively painless. The microchip protection device is linked to a national database where the animals information is registered.

If a lost pet is found and taken to a shelter, the microchip identification can be scanned by a veterinarian and, hopefully, the animal and owner can reunite. Using both the pet tracking collar and an implanted microchip can strengthen the chances of a safe return.

Taking the idea of tracking information to the recreational level, Darrel Cornish and Chad Huston, the founders and patentees of the UpLink system, use GPS technology to measure distance and to track carts on the golf course. UpLinks Clubhouse Computer uses a Windows-based wireless communications network. It provides a graphical

spread of the entire golf course that is viewed by Pro Shop employees to monitor activities.

The UpLink Corporation also offers a selection of four on-car caddy units with such features as measuring course distances, tips for each hole, two way communication, and two or three dimensional color graphics.

*Shane Mullan, a traditional recreational golfer feels "that this technology would help me and my golfing buddies settle some of our side bets and challenges as to who drove longer or was closer to the hole."*

Tracking devices are everywhere. The makers of LoJack, produce a popular vehicle tracking system that has become a common unit installed into many types of vehicles. It's powered by the vehicles battery and has a back up power source if it were to be disconnected.

This device is approximately the size of a cell phone and can be placed inconspicuously into 20-30 different places within a vehicles structure. Therefore, it's difficult for thieves to locate and destroy it, or become aware that the car or truck is protected with that system.

When a car or truck that contains the LoJack unit is stolen a report is filed with the police, and the authorities activate the LoJack system in the stolen car. This will in turn send a silent signal to the Police Tracking Computers that are installed in many police cars and aircrafts. The stolen

vehicle can then be recovered.

Information from the LoJack web site states there is a 25% recovery rate resulting in arrest, an added benefit, to prosecute the criminal.

New truck and car owners are getting their vehicles equipped with a Lojack unit not just for the added security but for the insurance savings.

James Wanamaker, a potential new car buyer, is also aware of the car insurance discount that comes with having an alarm or a tracking device installed.

*"I would prefer a tracking unit included with my purchase just for the lower insurance rates and that new car piece of mind. In the long run it would be a money saver and a good security benefit."*

With so many ways to track anything you want, some may feel an invasion of privacy or a government conspiracy. Mr. Wanamaker doesn't worry about whether or not the Government would use this technology against society.

He adds:

*"The Government can't handle all of that information, they have too much going on as it is. I don't believe in the paranoid Government theory that they would watch your every move and that ones personal freedom would be violated. I'm not a subscriber to that theory."*

By Mary Blankenship Howe

Illustrations By Stephen Howe

