

## Device monitors ambulance drivers

### Insurance for company dropping nearly 30 percent

BY MERYL DILLMAN  
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**Anderson County** - Supervisors at Medshore Ambulance Service now know who isn't buckling up when driving company vehicles. Supervisors also know who isn't using turn signals, and who is turning curves too fast.

As of the first week of February, 102 of the ambulance service's vehicles are equipped with the Road Safety SafeForce Driving System. The system tracks almost everything the driver does, such as accelerating, braking, use of sirens, use of seatbelts and turn signal usage.

"It actually changes driving habits," said Greg Shore, Medshore chief executive officer.

The system operates almost the same way a "black box" does in an airplane. The device records information about each person's driving habits. When the person who is driving gets in a vehicle, he or she must place a key-like device that contains personal identification information on a sensor, or an alarm will sound. Once the person's identification is entered, the person's driving performance is measured and recorded.

The system "grows" or makes a ticking sound when a driver is doing something that the system doesn't like, such as hitting the brakes too hard or fast or accelerating too quickly. If the problem isn't fixed within a matter of seconds, an alarm sounds. The number of alarms is tracked in the system.

Once information is transmitted through the system, the driver is given a grade. The grades range from one to 10, with one being the worst. If a driver gets lower than a five four times in a row, action will be taken, Mr. Shore said. The driver will be brought in for remedial driving training. Other steps will also be taken if that doesn't change driving.

Mr. Shore said the \$250,000 system should help reduce maintenance costs, such as unnecessary wear on brake pads and suspension, and insurance costs. He said vehicle insurance premiums for the company have dropped



This computerized road safety device will monitor the driving habits of Medshore employees.

about 30 percent since the system was put into use.

"We think it was an excellent investment on our part," he said.

Mr. Shore also hopes the number of accidents drop.

He said the company averages about eight to 10 accidents a year. Most of them involve an ambulance backing into something. Now a button located either on the back of the vehicle or in the back of the ambulance must be pushed to show that someone is watching as the vehicle backs up. This should prevent the vehicle from backing into something.

Major Keith Smith of the Anderson Police Department said he doesn't think the department has ever looked into a system similar to the one Medshore installed. He said the department has considered a system that tracks where police department vehicles are located but never purchased one.

Mr. Smith said the system would be beneficial to the department in certain situations, such as investigating wrecks department vehicles are in. The department would need to receive a grant to be able to purchase a system that would track nearly everything police officers do, he said.

"It's just if we have the need and the money for it," he said.

Not everyone who works at Medshore originally thought the new system would be beneficial.

"It's been a mixed reaction from our crews," Mr. Shore said.

Mr. Shore said some employees thought the system would make response times longer. But he said response times haven't really been affected by the system.

"Responses are going to be safer and less danger to the public," he said.

In 2005, Medshore employees responded to more than 95,000 calls.

Donna Wiles, an Emergency Medical Technician with the ambulance service, said the system makes her more cautious when she's driving.

"It makes us pay attention," she said.

Ms. Wiles, 45, said she thinks the system will make employees more aware of their driving habits when they hear the "tick." She also thinks drivers' safety will be influenced.

And safety is important to Mr. Shore.

"It's improving safety ... and that's what it's all about," Mr. Shore said.

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