

# Electronic Cell Check System

*Improving efficiency and reducing paperwork*

**Agency:** Nebraska Department of Correctional Services

**Trial Duration:**  
12/15/17–03/15/18

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Administrative Captain

### Context

Regularly scheduled cell checks in restricted-housing units ensure safety of residents, who are at a higher risk of suicide and self harm than general-population residents. This trial compared manually documented cell checks with a Guard1 electronic cell check system provided by Timekeeping Systems.

### Key Finding

All cell checks were completed accurately in all the intervention housing units given the electronic cell-check system, whereas only 56% of random video checks in the control housing units using manually documented cell checks were accurate.

\*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who lead trials.

## Background

The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) policy requires two cell checks every hour (no more than forty minutes apart) in the special management unit (SMU) at Tecumseh State Correctional Institution (TSCI), to ensure safety of its residents. Documentation shows that 90% of TSCI's cell-check problems come from this housing unit. TSCI tested an electronic cell-check system that requires staff to touch an electronic wand to a specially installed button on the housing unit to document that cells were checked. The system provides a report showing times of checks. The usual manual procedure requires that staff check cells and then write in a log the time that they were checked. Supervisors spot check the log to see that checks are conducted as required and that the logs are completed. Manual checks may inaccurately reflect check times, and can be inaccurately documented to indicate checks done as required. This trial tested cell-check technology to determine the usefulness of the system to enable timely and defensible cell checks. The trial also hoped to give supervisors an avenue for more prompt feedback or correction.

## Trial Design

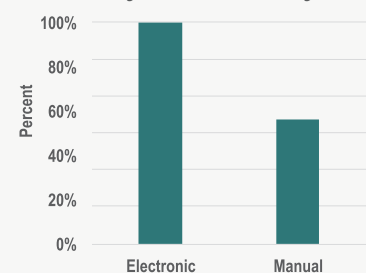
Two pairs of adjacent housing units (galleries) in the SMU with 42 cells each were randomly assigned to condition, with Lower Level EF assigned to the intervention condition (electronic cell-check system) and Lower Level AB assigned to the control condition (manual cell-check system). All

other prison-management procedures remained the same across the two conditions. The electronic system reports were used to determine accuracy of documentation and completed/late checks in the intervention condition. A random check of 100 cell checks entered as completed on time in the cell-check log were reviewed using routine videotaping of the housing units.

## Results

Over the three-month trial, 100% of electronic cell checks were reported accurately in the intervention galleries, and 10.6% of electronic cell checks were correctly documented as late or missing. Random video checks of the control galleries revealed that only 56% of the checks were completed accurately, with discrepancies between the videotape and the log regarding completed checks and the timeliness of the checks. Results suggest that the electronic system encourages timely cell checks given the automated documentation.

Accuracy of Cell Check Systems



\*Statistically significant difference at  $p < 0.05$

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