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Security and Technology — New Challenges, Creative Solutions

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Care and custody, public safety, security — these are all terms corrections professionals have always lived by. But in today's post-Sept. 11 world, security has taken on a new and even more serious connotation. The glaring recognition of the potential catastrophic results that security and information flaws can have on the safety of the general public, staff and inmates within our purview has catapulted the notion of security technology to the forefront of our priorities.

Toward the end of the 20th century, there was much discussion and planning for the anticipated expansion of technology in the correctional environment. We are now at the point where the comprehensive integration of technology with the operation is both feasible and necessary. In order to survive in today's technology-driven society, departments of correction have to adapt and embrace cutting-edge technology. No longer can the hesitant among us ignore this reality. Today, we face increased demands for information, precision and pre-emption alongside decreased budgets and resources. We are no strangers to doing more with less, but meeting correctional goals under today's unprecedented circumstances requires creative and prompt action, as well as progressive leadership.

Leadership in the introduction of technology to correctional settings

must first focus on fostering a culture of willingness to explore new systems and a commitment to making technology work. Another contributing factor to success is developing and cultivating partnerships with other states and agencies relative to information sharing. By sharing experiences and lessons learned, knowledge becomes the power that leads us to become better-educated consumers.

When viewed on a national level, the correctional community may seem large, but we share common goals. Our needs and priorities are similar when it comes to technology such as contraband detection, inmate and staff locator systems, less-than-lethal technologies, inmate identification and tracking devices, and information technology. Acknowledging our mutual needs makes it all the more apparent that we must work together amongst ourselves, as well as with the private sector technical experts, to find the best and most cost-effective solutions to our common problems.

Traditionally, many departments view security and potential vendors in the context of corrections. While this may appear sensible, doing so narrows the possibilities. We need to look past what we typically think of as security and view the concept of security in the broader context. Homeland security, military defense, corporate intelligence, airport securi-

ty, power plant protection and prison security all have a common thread. Often, technologies developed to meet noncorrectional security needs have applicability to a correctional setting. When modified for corrections, they often offer more creative and sophisticated solutions than prepackaged correctional applications. Through the years, I have found that many vendors specializing in nonprison security technologies are very receptive to enhancing their products to meet correctional needs. As corrections professionals, we have much expertise to offer the private sector. As security system experts, they have much to offer us. Exploring and adapting technologies that are not traditional to corrections is one of many ways to effectively manage facilities and augment our existing security systems.

One does not need to look too far to see examples of states all across the country working together and implementing emerging technologies to meet today's challenges. This issue of *Corrections Today* highlights some of these fine examples. In this climate of collaboration and sharing both success stories and shortcomings, I expect to see the field of corrections continue to become more technologically savvy and capable of successfully navigating through these difficult and challenging times. ♦