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Pendants Carry Alarm for High-Risk Abuse Victims; The Device Provides Another Safety Tool

By Emily Block

Victims of domestic abuse around the nation are arming themselves with necklace-style alarms – pendants its provider says have saved dozens of lives.

But officials say the technology only goes so far.

Through a coordinated program with area law-enforcement officials, domestic violence shelters and prosecutors' offices, the nation's largest electronic security provider donates the alarms to people who are deemed at the highest level of risk for lethal attack.

The program – AWARE, which stands for Abused Women's Active Response Emergency – has been introduced in about 170 U.S. cities, including Des Moines and Council Bluffs, Iowa, since 1992, according to Ann Lindstrom, spokeswoman for ADT Security Services Inc.

It also is being used in West Allis, Wis., and Peoria, Ill.

The security device recently saved the life of a West Virginia woman whose estranged husband reportedly held her at knifepoint at her home, Lindstrom said. The woman activated her alarm and police arrived soon after.

“We like the equipment to be reserved for people in very dangerous circumstances because it is donated, and we want to know it is being used for someone who really needs it,” Lindstrom said.

ADT recommends guidelines for local agencies to follow when selecting victims to receive the alarm, but the security company provides as many pendants that are requested for as long as the need exists. The program calls for a system of rotating the devices into other “at-risk” homes when a person no longer needs the pendant.

ADT installs security systems in the homes and provides the victims with pendants, which can send a silent alarm, when activated, to ADT's customer monitoring center. ADT operators alert law-enforcement officials that an AWARE call has been received, and officers are dispatched to the victim's residence on a priority basis.

The water-resistant alarms work inside the victim's home and in the yard, and can be activated by pressing either the pendant or a button on the security system panel mounted in the home.

"While we understand that attacks also occur outside of the home, this is one area where a person should feel safe and be able to sleep at night, and ADT can help in that regard," Lindstrom said.

Although Dubuque Assistant Police Chief Terry Tobin agrees that the program offers another avenue for notification, he says it would not be his police department's first choice.

"For our purposes, it certainly is more advantageous if you can get on the phone and get that call through 911 because then you don't have that middle man," said Tobin, adding that the tool would be useful for those who do not have immediate access to a telephone.

"The direct call to 911 is going to help us tailor our response to the specific problem, as opposed to a blind call from the alarm company."

Agreeing, Lindstrom said, "This doesn't replace calling 911, but it does add another tool in the arsenal against domestic violence."

Tobin said his primary concern with AWARE, which has not been introduced in the Dubuque area, is that victims would become too reliant and confident with the alarm system and use it as their sole means of communication with law enforcement.

Although the program's deterrent value is difficult to quantify, Lindstrom said the program has saved at least 35 lives since it began in the United States.

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