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### Politics

# Surgical tags plan for sex offenders

Silicon chip to be inserted under skin

**Martin Bright, home affairs editor**

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[The Observer](#)

Britain is considering a controversial scheme to implant surgically electronic tags in convicted paedophiles amid fears that the extent of the abuse of children has been massively underestimated.

Documents obtained by The Observer reveal the Government could track paedophiles by satellite, with a system similar to that used to locate stolen cars.

The tags can be put beneath the skin under local anaesthetic and would also be able to monitor the heart rate and blood pressure of the abuser, alerting staff to the possibility that another attack was imminent.

A letter from Hilary Benn, the Minister responsible for the supervision of sex offenders in the community, reveals the Home Office's electronic monitoring team is already developing technology to track paedophiles constantly. The team is now investigating the 'implant tag' after it was alerted to its capabilities by a campaign group for victims of paedophiles.

Tracker, the company which runs Britain's largest stolen vehicle monitoring network, has already been approached about paedophile monitoring and computer company Compaq has been asked to develop the software.

Compaq Software Solutions has developed similar technology for Nasa to monitor remotely the bodily functions of astronauts. In the case of paedophiles, the technology would not measure sexual



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excitement, but would monitor the offender's state of nervousness and fear.

Technology currently used can tell only whether an offender is where he is supposed to be, which is usually a curfew address. New 'reverse tags' can also monitor whether an offender is approaching a former victim's house or a high-risk area such as a school, but it can not track every movement.

In a letter to Labour MP Andrew Mackinley, Benn wrote: 'The Electronic Monitoring Team is... looking actively at the possibilities for using tracking technology to monitor offenders' whereabouts as they move from one place to another. To date... the team is unaware of any available technology which uses bodily implants to track offenders' movements or which can measure bodily functions to predict likely criminal activity. Such future improvements are, however, worthy of consideration if it can be demonstrated to be feasible and reliable in delivering improvements in public protection.'

Ministers would need to pass new legislation to oblige offenders to be surgically fitted with the tags.

Civil liberties groups expressed horror at the proposals last night. 'Implanting tracking devices provides a very frightening vision for the future. We already know that the rules protecting our privacy are inadequate. Where would this stop?' said John Wadham, director of Liberty. 'This would be used initially for sex offenders, but we would soon find that other marginalised groups, such as asylum seekers, would find they were forced to have implants.'

The implant tag has been proposed by Phoenix Survivors, a group of child abuse victims who were traded as child prostitutes in the north-west of England. Their name is taken from Operation Phoenix, an investigation into the activities of 72-year-old Stanley Claridge.

Claridge's stepdaughter and Phoenix Survivors' spokeswoman Shy Keenan said: 'I am sick to death of it being acceptable that I am a victim because these people have to have their human rights. These people live outside the law and cannot be controlled, so you have to know what they are doing all the time.'

The news of the implant tags comes after the first wave of arrests from a list of 7,000 suspected British paedophiles was passed to British police by investigators from the US Postal Inspection Service.

Credit card details had been traced to British customers of a portal on the internet, which gave access to hundreds of child porn sites. An investigation by Northumbria police as part of the nationwide Operation Ore led to the seizure of hard drives from more than 100 computers. Police in the North East had been given around 70 names from the list of 7,000 to arrest. In all, 56 men and four women were

arrested. They were not picked up by the usual vetting procedures because most had no previous criminal record.

The computer files seized included the scenes of the rape of children as young as two. One man had 12,000 images of child abuse on his computer. As a result, Northumbria Police has estimated that the numbers of people on the Sex Offenders' Register in the area will increase by 10 per cent. If the hit-rate of the Northumbria investigation is replicated across the country, it could lead to as many as 5,000 arrests.

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