

NEC does Justice with Prisoner Call Control System

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (WA)

NEC won the tender to replace the phone systems in Western Australia's 13 prisons with a state-of-the-art, cost-effective and secure solution predicted by the WA Department of Justice to improve staff and inmate morale. The move follows more than 180 prisoner complaints last year to the WA Department of Justice about the high costs of the current system for which charges are the same as those on public pay phones.

According to the WA Department of Justice, the old system was also difficult to maintain and had become a serious morale issue for WA prison staff, as well as the inmates for whom the phone is their only link to the outside world. Improvements to prison security were also a major factor in the decision-making process.

The new StarNet SecureTek phone systems have been jointly developed with NEC software development partner, Starnet Systems, to improve the flexibility and security of phones within WA prisons from Broome in the state's north down to Albany in the south.

The WA Department of Justice's Telecommunications Manager, Mr Howard Bunt, says the NEC Prisoner

Call Control System will integrate well with the Department's existing and reliable telephony equipment. NEC also has the maintenance contract for the Department's 146 sites throughout the state.

The new system will also help a variety of WA prison operations run more smoothly including the elimination of unpleasant encounters for officers having to direct inmates to finish phone calls and attend prison musters. The new technology has a remote termination function that can be activated centrally for such occasions. Other features include call restriction profiles, call monitoring and recording, directory, call-accounting, reporting and interactive voice solutions.

Mr Bunt says the NEC system is programmed to give each prisoner a personal PIN with ten pre-approved phone numbers to which they can make 10-minute phone calls.

Callers are given a series of warnings that begin 45 seconds before their call time is up and then cut off when it has expired. "When they hang up the system won't allow them to make another phone call for 10 minutes, which stops stand-over tactics so that other prisoners can get on the system."

"The same people looking after our system will be looking after the maintenance of this new system," explains Howard Bunt, WA Department of Justice's Telecommunications Manager. "This played a big part in our strategic thinking. We just find that everything they do, they do very well."

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Mr Bunt says the system will also disallow calls to unauthorised numbers and enable reporting of such attempts. However, it does allow prisoners to access 1800 and other community service phone numbers such as Quit Line and Crime Stoppers, in addition to their ten approved numbers.

According to Mr Bunt: "Security staff can monitor phone calls from their workstations. They can earmark when certain prisoners are on the phone. We can automatically bring up all of a particular prisoner's recordings whose conversations can be listened to by police at their desktops within 10 minutes of the initial query". Records of phone calls are stored on DVD with a ten extension system able to hold approximately 8 weeks worth of calls.

The new phone system can be set up as a credit or prepaid arrangement. Credit levels can be pre-set and phone calls are automatically billed to individual client accounts.

Mr Bunt says the system, which has been trialled since July in Perth's Bandyup Women's Prison, has been shown to be "first class", having resulted in an average weekly phone bill saving of 27 per cent, or \$6, per prisoner. "That might not seem like much to us but when the maximum you get paid for everything in prison is \$44 per week, it's quite a lot."

The NEC system has already been successfully implemented in Northern Territory and ACT prisons, according to NEC's Business Development Manager, Mr Milton Purcell. He says NEC is keen to provide the phone systems for every one of Australia's 83 major prisons, and the many smaller prison farms and detention centres across the country. "The human resources benefits in terms of lower prison staff stress levels, as well as the efficiency and control enabled by this solution, make it much more appealing and serviceable than its predecessors," says Mr Purcell.

About the WA Department of Justice

The Department of Justice (formerly known as the Ministry of Justice) was established in 1993 to make the West Australian system of justice more responsive to the needs of the community.

Its mission is to provide quality, coordinated and accessible justice services which contribute to a safe and orderly community.

The Department's functions include managing adult and juvenile offenders in custody and in the community in a manner consistent with court orders, community standards and preventing crime.