

eCharging Tool Helps Keep Law Enforcement on Patrol in Minnesota Communities



Every year, there are more than 10,000 felony convictions in Minnesota; there are nearly 100,000 criminal complaints, and nearly 200,000 separate charges. That's every year. And for every one of those complaints, there is a paper trail that must be created involving the arresting law enforcement agency, attorneys, the court system and the state. It is a necessary part of the work done by Minnesota criminal justice agencies. But it is time consuming and expensive.

eCharging is helping to change that by replacing the paper-driven process with an electronic process.

How eCharging Works

To get a better understanding of how that happens, consider the traditional paper trail using Parker's Prairie, Minnesota as an example. Following an arrest, a police officer creates a report. The officer then drives that report to the nearest county courthouse – in this case, Fergus Falls, nearly 50 miles away. The county attorney receives the report, dictates a criminal complaint, then a staff member enters that complaint data into a computer. When that's done, the complaint is routed internally to the county attorney who prints it and then signs it. The Parker's Prairie police officer, who may have returned to his work in Parker's Prairie, now must make the hour-long drive back to Fergus Falls to the county attorney's office to sign the criminal complaint in front of a notary. The officer brings the complaint to the courthouse where a court administrator delivers the complaint to a judge for signing. Then the police officer makes the trip back to Parker's Prairie once again. That was before eCharging.

With eCharging, this entire process happens in minutes rather than hours. The police officer refers the report electronically to the prosecutor. The complaint is then created from the electronic incident data. The prosecutor finalizes the complaint in their system and signs it electronically. The system emails the officer that the complaint is ready for the officer's electronic signature, which is notarized electronically. The system then emails the court that the complaint is ready for the judge's electronic signature. All of this happens without the police officer needing to leave his or her jurisdiction – leaving more time to patrol the streets in Parker's Prairie.

Savings Add Up for Local Agencies

The time and money saved by using eCharging can be significant. In a greater Minnesota community like Parker's Prairie, without eCharging the officer could spend more than four hours on the road delivering paperwork and waiting for signatures. The time commitment was also long in metro communities, with the process taking two or more hours of the officer's time to complete. That's time

on the clock, and away from the communities they serve. Costs involved in the paper system can also include gasoline, paper, and other supplies.

When eCharging first went on-line, counties were reporting savings in the hundreds of thousands – and savings like this are happening all across Minnesota.

A Growing Number of Uses

The eCharging application allows not only electronic complaint processing, but electronic search warrants, citations and DWI arrests as well. Fully in place statewide in 2014, eCharging has continued to evolve. In 2021, the BCA added electronic DWI processing for off-road vehicles like boats, snowmobiles and ATVs to eCharging.

[Learn more about eCharging.](#)