

## Centralia Police Department to Implement Video Arraignments

Technology: Police Will No Longer Have to Transport Inmates from Lewis County Jail

Posted: Tuesday, April 2, 2013 10:19 am | *Updated: 10:35 am, Tue Apr 2, 2013.*

**By Kyle Spurr**

Rather than transporting inmates from the Lewis County jail to Centralia Municipal Court by police van for misdemeanor arraignment hearings, a new video arraignment system will allow inmates to appear before a judge while still in custody at the jail.

The video arraignments, the first of their kind in Lewis County, will go into effect in the Centralia Municipal Court on Tuesday, April 23.

Police Chief Bob Berg said transporting inmates for court arraignments created safety concerns, staffing problems and a drain on resources since multiple trips had to be made between the municipal court and the jail on hearing days.

“We spent a great deal of staff time on Tuesdays doing court transports,” Berg said.

Berg said the video arraignments will be a part of the video visitation program already set up at the Lewis County Jail through the company HomeWAV. The video arraignment will cost the city \$15 an hour.

Berg estimates the new system will cost about \$750 to \$1,500 a year, but with the savings from less transporting, the city should come out even.

When the video arraignment begins later this month, a court clerk and community service officer will be sent to the jail to assist the inmates with paperwork. A fax machine will be set up to send documents between the court and the jail.

Municipal Court Judge Steve Buzzard will be able to see each inmate on a screen before hearing a plea and setting bail.

The municipal court practiced a dry run with the system on Friday and Berg said city staff had no problem using the technology.

Berg, who originally proposed the idea for video arraignment in 1987 as a Lewis County undersheriff, said it is not a cost savings measure but purely a safety improvement.

“We’ve had a couple of escapes from court but caught them quickly,” Berg said. “It’s always better to have them in custody.”