

Just what is START program?

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The START (Sanction, Treatment, Assessment, Revocation and Transition) program is an 80-bed facility located at Warm Springs. Male offenders are placed in the program after disciplinary, on-site or intervention hearing by a community corrections hearings officer as a sanction or because the offender's community placement was revoked.

Sanctioned offenders will likely be at the program for 30 days or less. The division administrator must approve longer stays. After completing their stay, offenders will go back to their previous status such as parole, probation, prerelease or conditional release. Sanctioned offenders are seen as doing county jail time for not complying with supervision requirements.

One might call a sanction a "wake-up" call. The hearings officer is warning an offender that his freedom is in serious jeopardy. During the sanction period, the staff at START will assist offenders and give them opportunities to improve their chances of staying in the community once released.

Revocation-status offenders are placed at START after a community corrections hearings officer feels the offender has worn out his welcome in the community.

It is likely that the offender has been given prior chances to fulfill supervision conditions and the time has come for the offender to be held accountable for not following the rules. It is also likely that a hearings officer feels the offender is posing a threat to public safety and is probably viewed as out of control and needing more structure.

Prior to the opening of START in mid-December, offenders would have gone directly to the reception unit at the Montana State Prison.

The goal of START is to assess the offender's options and to see what might help him to be returned to the community instead of being sent to prison. The assessment will come in the form of exploring the offender's needs and determining the root of the offender's behavior that landed him in the program.

Once staffers have completed the assessment and are comfortable with the offender's progress, they will work with the offender to apply for community

options. The options may be prerelease, intensive or enhanced supervision, boot camp, or even a straight parole or conditional release.