

co cameras will snag motorists who fail to pay tolls at E-ZPass lanes on the Atlantic City Expressway, and Routes 95 and 1 in Delaware.

The cost to the violator: the price of the toll, plus a \$25 administrative fee.

Officials from the Regional Consortium — the five transportation agencies that use E-ZPass — acknowledged that the project, delayed since November, marks a sea change for transportation facilities.

Getting the Secaucus-based violations center operational has been a painstaking process. Since January, state transportation officials have imposed a \$25,000 monthly penalty on MFS Network Technologies of Mount Laurel, the

Authority, New Jersey Highway Authority, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and South Jersey Transportation Agency.

"Public officials and agency officials were concerned about our ability to deliver the most ambitious, complex undertaking ever commissioned," said state Transportation Commissioner James Weinstein. "This is good news for the project and bad news for the people who try to violate toll-booths."

The automated violation system replaces traditional law enforcement methods on some roads for catching toll evaders. The computerized method for nailing motorists will eventually be used at all of New Jersey's and Delaware's 700 E-ZPass tolls, including those

ers by adding more police at toll-booths. The agency also has hired a collection agency to go after violators who have ignored repeated warnings to pay.

The violations processing center, operated by MFS, is a 12,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art complex.

Here's how it works: Video cameras at tollbooths record license plates on vehicles that pass through E-ZPass without paying the appropriate toll. The information is electronically transmitted to the center. A three-tiered verification process is conducted before a motorist is notified.

Sean M. Cleary, general manager for MFS, said crews will determine whether a motorist is an E-ZPass customer and if there are

There will be a \$25 fine in addition to the toll.

The center will process 5,000 images daily at first, but eventually can handle up to 70,000 per day. Cleary said the center expects to recover about 50 percent of the fines.

The agencies expect to raise \$50 million a year through toll prosecutions. Part of that money will pay for the \$500 million violations processing center, said Edward Gross, executive director of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority.

Toll evaders will receive an "advisory and payment request" — a form that gives motorists an opportunity to dispute the charge.

But officials said it will be difficult to dispute a computerized image.



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At the Secaucus violations center Friday, Aida Igartua, at computer, demonstrating the E-ZPass method for issuing a toll violations ticket.

# Suit says nasal spray made migraine sufferer an addict

By AGNES HOOPER GOTTLIEB  
Staff Writer

An Upper Saddle River woman has filed suit against a New Jersey pharmaceutical company, claiming she became addicted to a nasal spray prescribed to treat her migraine headaches.

The suit by Annette Nurkin, 36, is the latest in a series of legal actions surrounding the drug Stadol, which was first marketed by the Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. as a nasal spray pain reliever in 1992.

Nurkin, who the suit claims had no history of drug abuse, checked herself in to a drug rehabilitation facility to overcome the dependency.

She began using the nasal spray in spring 1997. "Within months, she began to experience addictive tendencies to this drug," said the suit, filed this week in state Superior Court in Hackensack.

The suit says Nurkin suffered "hot and cold flashes, mild tremors, crying, weight loss, [and] in-

creased headaches" while she took the drug. After about six months, the suit claims, she checked into Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern, N.Y., for a weeklong treatment.

The suit charges that by February 1995, the Princeton-based drug company was aware that "addiction to Stadol was widespread [and] appeared to develop rapidly, and that discontinuing use of Stadol was very difficult."

Despite this knowledge, the complaint says, the company "failed to add a warning to the drug and continued to aggressively market Stadol for migraine sufferers."

Patrick Donohue, associate director of public affairs at Bristol-Myers Squibb, said Friday that his company had cooperated with the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Administration to have Stadol made a Schedule IV controlled drug. That was done in October 1997,

just a fortnight before Nurkin checked herself in for treatment.

Stadol was first sold in 1978 as an injectable pain reliever, and the nasal spray was marketed 14 years later. Now the label's fine print warns that the drug could cause drowsiness or dizziness and that physicians should use special care in prescribing the medication "to patients with a history of drug abuse or to patients receiving the drug on a continuous basis for an extended period."

Physicians should follow "proper patient selection," Donohue said.

Donohue said his company has not seen the Bergen County lawsuit and could not comment on that specifically. Although several lawsuits have been filed nationwide, he said, an attempt to create a class-action suit in Chicago failed.

"Some were dismissed," Donohue said. "Some may have been settled or otherwise resolved."

Traditionally, he said, settlement cases remain private.

The drug came under media scrutiny in 1995 when a law student from Miami reportedly became addicted to the medication and committed suicide.

Donohue noted, however, that Stadol continued to be sold as a "potent medication that is used in the management of pain."

Although Stadol is commonly prescribed for use during acute migraines, Donohue said, it also is

used for pain relief after surgery or for broken bones.

"We believe Stadol is a safe and effective product," Donohue said. Still, he noted, the medication should be "taken as prescribed by the physician."

Brad Stone, of the public affairs department of the Food and Drug Administration, said reports of deaths or addictions stemming from use of Stadol could be obtained only through a Freedom of Information request.

Nurkin has suffered from mi-

graines since she was 5, said her attorney, John J. Scura. He said the headaches were so severe she was forced to lie in a darkened room. Then her doctor prescribed Stadol.

"It did help," Scura said. "It did relieve the migraine pain, but you have to keep pumping the stuff."

Since her hospitalization, Scura said, Nurkin has struggled with the addiction again.

"She's like a yo-yo," he said. "She's up and down."

# DYFS has 'a long way to go' on foster-care plan, state says

By OVETTA WIGGINS  
Trenton Bureau

An ambitious plan to revamp the state's foster-care system has resulted in modest improvements over the last year, says a report

that they are taking a step in the right direction," she said. "But they are modest gains. The question is, is it enough? The blue-ribbon panel considered foster care a high priority: they really

The goal is to increase the number of siblings placed together from 60 percent to 75 percent by 2001. But since July 1998, no change has taken place in that area either.