

WADA Ethics Panel publishes position paper on ‘ethical considerations concerning geolocalization of athletes’

On 28 February, the World Anti-Doping Agency’s (WADA’s) Ethics Panel published a position paper in the British Journal of Sports Medicine titled ‘Geolocalization of athletes: ethical considerations’.

The panel, which carried out an in-depth study of the subject followed by an extensive debate into the possible pros and cons of introducing such technology to the fight against doping in sport, has recommended to WADA that the Agency should not authorize the use of geolocalization technology when tracking athletes for the purpose of out-of-competition testing.

It should be noted that the panel’s paper and recommendation have not yet been considered by WADA’s Executive Committee and therefore it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Agency. The recommendation is scheduled to be tabled during the committee’s May 2018 meeting, after which the committee’s views will be published.

As outlined in the position paper, the panel looked in depth at the issue of employing the technology with the view to enhancing the whereabouts rules and the quality of information contained in WADA’s Anti-Doping Administration and Management System (ADAMS).

As well as conducting research, led by Prof. Pascal Borry from the Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law in Leuven, Belgium, the panel met twice to discuss the issue and also garnered the views of athletes. But despite some minor possible benefits, the panel’s position paper concludes that the use of geolocalization would be full of ethical concerns and not, on balance, desirable or useful.

It states: “While benefits remain largely hypothetical and minimal, the potential invasion of privacy and the data security threats are real. Considering the impact on privacy, data security issues, the societal ramifications of offering such services and various pragmatic considerations, the WADA Ethics Panel concludes that at this time the use of geolocalization should neither be mandated as a tool for disclosing whereabouts, nor implemented on a voluntary basis.”

The full paper can be found [HERE](#).

Some athletes have suggested that using a GPS or other kind of tracking device could replace the task of reporting and updating their whereabouts information. However, in reality, even if geolocalization technology was used, whereabouts data for ADAMS would still be needed to enable testing authorities to plan their missions sufficiently in advance.

The paper further states: “Athletes have a moral and legal right to privacy... The proportionality plays an important role in this evaluation as whereabouts rules should pursue a legitimate aim (e.g. anti-doping) but should not interfere unnecessarily with an individual’s rights and interests.”

The paper goes on to mention the important recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that concluded that whereabouts rules as they operate currently were proportionate and necessary to maintain the integrity of out-of-competition controls, which is the backbone of anti-doping testing programs around the world.

The purpose of the WADA Ethics Panel is to provide expert ethical opinion on issues that arise in the fight against doping in sport and to develop and/or recommend ethically sound policy or suggestions to WADA management.