

## Department of Corrections Security Operations (Report Highlights)

December 2000

Security Operations is part of the Prison Operations program of the Department of Corrections. This program oversees inmate management, ensures delivery of essential inmate goods and services, maintains security systems, and provides training. The program's goals include preventing escapes, reducing assaults, prohibiting the introduction of contraband, and minimizing disturbances.

### Our Conclusions:

The Department has substantially improved security in almost all areas and the number of escapes has dropped dramatically. However, the Department still has to operate some facilities where the poor design or the types of buildings diminishes staff and inmate safety. Despite this, our consultants found that the Department “. . . is making highly commendable and largely effective efforts to provide a safe and secure environment.”

### Some Prisons' Designs Pose Security and Safety Problems

The Department generally operates a secure prison system. In fact, the Eyman complex in Florence and the recently built Lewis complex in Buckeye provide state-of-the-art security and are models for the rest of the nation and the world. These facilities include “touch screen” technology permitting an officer to quickly open and close doors, monitor sound, and control water and lights.

In contrast, the Department must use some facilities where inmates and staff are not as safe. These include tents, converted hotels, and other units that are inadequate for correctional purposes.

Medium-security cell at Lewis.



### Poor Design Creates Safety Issues

One dormitory in Florence is in the shape of an “H” permitting access between dorms but restricting officer surveillance of inmates. Partitions separating the beds

are too high to observe inmates. Outside doors lock electronically, but inside doors lock manually. Our consultants describe this facility design as one of the most dangerous they have seen.

**Dormitory partitions that are too high.**



Another poor design is the Phoenix Flamenco Unit where chronically mentally ill inmates are housed in two- to eight-person rooms, on long dark hallways. Staff making rounds and inmate counts basically lose contact with backup officers who cannot see or hear them.

Our consultants reported that “. . . given the drawbacks relating to the poor design of several older prisons and the very difficult staffing issues the department faces, wardens and deputy wardens are achieving more than they could reasonably be expected to . . .”

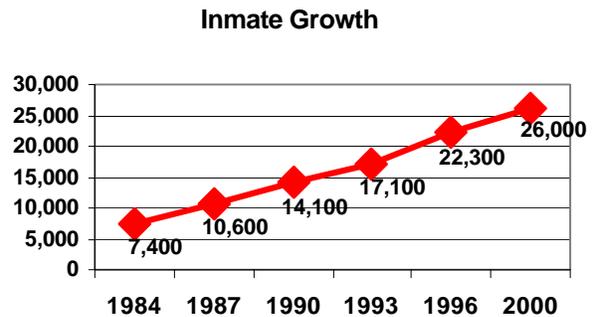
**Temporary Facilities Must Be Used**

The Department uses numerous tents, Quonset huts, and other prefabricated buildings that make proper inmate surveillance and control difficult. For example, 1,000 medium security level inmates live in 100 ten-bed tents which cannot be secured in the event of a disturbance.

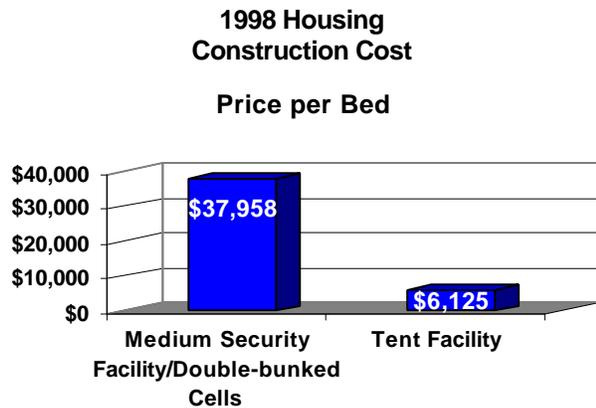
**Three Factors Force the Operation of Deficient Prisons**

A combination of inmate population growth, limited resources for new construction, and staffing shortages has forced the use of less secure facilities..

**Inmate population**—the number of inmates in the prison system has skyrocketed since the mid-80's.



**Facility costs**—The rapid growth in the inmate population has brought a corresponding growth in dollars needed to build spaces to house the inmates. Security issues aside, using tents and Quonset huts is a less expensive alternative to building prisons.



**Staffing shortages**—Compounding the problems with facilities, 1,550 beds are empty at the Lewis facility in Buckeye, which was completed over a year ago. Lewis is less than half occupied because the Department cannot hire enough staff.

The Department should:

- ✓ Continue efforts to open all units at Lewis;
- ✓ Eliminate the use of tents; and
- ✓ Replace and modify, over time, buildings and structures that hamper security.

**Department Should Continue to Improve Inmate Management**

Effective management policies and practices allow staff to monitor inmates' location, control their behavior, prevent assaults, contraband, and escapes.

Many effective inmate management policies and practices are in place:

- Staff conduct several inmate counts each day;
- Inmate movement is tracked;
- Outside visitors are preapproved and personal contact is limited;
- Inmates are searched periodically along with quarterly searches of living areas; and
- Inmates are permitted only clear-cased radios and TVs which can be purchased through the inmate store.

**Too few staff for some areas**—There are not enough staff in some areas to adequately monitor inmates. This also reduces the number of cell searches. In one search, an officer confiscated pliers, drill bits, razor blades, hacksaw blades, wire, and other dangerous contraband.

  
*In the Florence East Unit, one officer must monitor 7 Quonset huts housing 9 to 11 inmates each.*  


The Department should:

- ✓ Determine the number of staff needed to adequately fill critical posts monitoring inmate activity.

**Other Security Practices Sound, But Some Can Be Improved**

Our consultants found the Department has significantly improved other security practices such as:

- Inspecting facilities and controlling access to potentially dangerous tools;
- Transporting inmates between prisons; and
- Inspecting incoming items to prevent the introduction of drugs and other contraband.

**The Department Has Not Consistently Addressed Some Areas**

- The Department does not consistently conduct emergency drills requiring officers to open doors using keys rather than relying on electronic locks;
- The Department does not consistently test security by having someone try to smuggle contraband in or try to get in without authority; and
- Some complexes dispense narcotic and psychotropic drugs in pill rather than in liquid form. Inmates can fake swallowing pills and then hoard and sell them to other inmates.

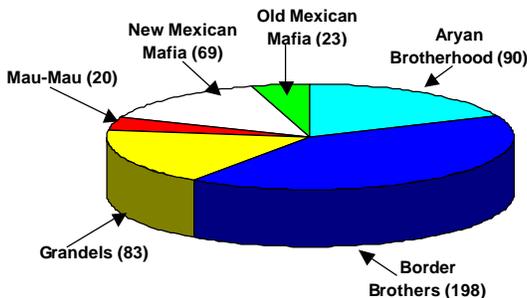
**The Department should:**

- ✓ Adopt a policy requiring every unit and complex to conduct simulated emergency key runs involving all staff;
- ✓ Adopt a policy requiring every unit and complex to conduct security challenges; and
- ✓ Develop and implement uniform policies requiring medical staff to use a liquid form of narcotic and psychotropic drugs.

**Other Pertinent Information About Prison Gangs**

In 1997 the Department implemented a policy for managing prison gangs or **Security Threat Groups** (STGs).

**Prison Gang Memberships**



STG members are housed in a maximum-security unit at Eyman. They have severely reduced privileges:

- Confined to cells 24 hours per day;
- Can only exercise outside of their cells 3 hours per week;
- Cannot earn early release credits;
- Cannot earn more than 20¢ per hour by working; and
- Have reduced store privileges.

**Maximum-security cell at Eyman.**



**To Obtain More Information**

- A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling (602) 553-0333 or by visiting our Web site at:

[www.auditor.gen.state.az.us](http://www.auditor.gen.state.az.us)

- The contact person for this report is **Shan Hays**.