

Court Holding Facility – Santa Cruz

Background

The Court Holding facility, nicknamed “the tomb,” is located at 701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, below the courtrooms. It is a concrete structure without windows and with only two exits. Inmates are transported by vehicle from their custodial facilities and held at Court Holding before and after their court appearances. The Grand Jury toured the facility on September 10, 2007.

Findings

1. The Court Holding facility was clean and well maintained.
2. Guns and knives are forbidden in Court Holding, even for law enforcement although officers may carry batons and/or stun guns. Other weapons are secured in lockers located outside the Court Holding entrance doors.
3. Staffing generally consists of ten deputies each day, with at least one female deputy on duty for searching female inmates. The first shift begins at 7:30 am, and the last shift leaves at 5:00 pm. All deputy sheriffs spend at least one year assigned to Court Holding.
4. The number of inmates held at Court Holding each day ranges from 20 to 60. Previously, when drug court was held at the courthouse, the number of inmates could reach 90. Drug court is now held at the Main Jail in Department 11.
5. On days when they appear in court, most inmates are held in Court Holding between 7:30 am and 11:00 am. Inmates are served breakfast and dinner at the detention facility. If inmates are at Court Holding during lunch hours, they are served bagged lunches.
6. At 7:15 am each weekday, vans are dispatched from 701 Ocean Street to the various detention centers to pick up inmates who are appearing in court that day. Each van holds up to 13 detainees who can be separated into three compartments. The number of trips each day depends on the number of inmates going to Court Holding, the security classification of the inmates, and the time the courts finish for the day.
7. There are four transport vans, one each for transporting inmates to and from detention facilities and Court Holding.
8. Before transport, inmates are given a security classification to determine van and cell placement. If an inmate is involved in an incident or commits a crime, he or she is reclassified immediately.
9. Approximately a year and a half ago, new restraint standards were implemented. Most inmates are now manacled while being transported to and from court, incarcerated in a Court Holding cell or appearing in a courtroom. Since then, very few, if any, escape attempts have occurred. There are times when a judge will order “no chains” and the chains are then removed from inmates. All inmates – chained or not – have the opportunity to change into attire appropriate for court appearances.

10. At this time, the video surveillance of the holding cells is not being recorded because of a problem finding storage space for the digital data. Staff is reviewing a possible storage solution and is hoping to secure adequate space for storing video recordings in the near future.
11. Before being placed into a holding cell, the inmates are searched for contraband items. Inmates are allowed to have court papers, although deputies take possession of them while the inmates are in the holding cells, returning the documents to the inmates for their court appearances.
12. If a medical problem or emergency occurs, or if there is an altercation which results in injury, Emergency Services is called. Medical problems and emergencies are handled first, then incidents are documented.
13. When an incident such as a fight or other disruption occurs, deputies file either an incident or crime report. Verbal insults, or refusal to follow commands, result in disciplinary action, which can range from a loss of privileges at the detention facility to new charges being filed.
14. Each holding cell consists of a concrete room, with concrete benches built into the walls. There is a window on the door of each cell. A red rectangle is painted on the floor around the door. Inmates must stay outside the red lines. Holding Cell One contains emergency lights, a dome mirror, sprinklers, vents, a toilet and a sink.
15. Toilets in the holding cells are flushed by deputies in response to requests, or every half hour during prisoner “welfare checks.” This procedure prevents prisoners from creating disturbances by clogging the toilets.
16. The five holding cells are currently utilized as follows:
 - Cell One (maximum occupancy 16) – males: general population
 - Cell Two (maximum occupancy 16) – males: Sureño gang members, white supremacists, and black gang members
 - Cell Three (maximum occupancy 15) – females
 - Cell Four (maximum occupancy 15) – males: juveniles, Norteño gang members
 - Cell Five (maximum occupancy 16) – males in protective custody (sex offenders, medical issues, gang dropouts)
17. Deputies conduct walkthrough “welfare checks” on all inmates in holding cells at least every 30 minutes. They also use cameras to constantly monitor all cells (excluding Cell 3, reserved for women).
18. The annual budget for court security is \$2.5 million, which is paid by the State under a contract with the Sheriff’s Office. Court transportation costs are included in the Sheriff’s Office budget.

Conclusions

1. The facility is well maintained and clean.
2. The staff is professional, well trained, and knowledgeable performing day-to-day operations as well as skilled at interacting with inmates.
3. The inmate restraint system implemented approximately a year and a half ago has resulted in fewer escape attempts and violent incidents.
4. Moving drug court cases to the Main Jail has reduced the number of inmates transported and processed through the main courthouse and Court Holding.
5. Because the deputies in Court Holding have to maintain a high level of attention while handling potentially dangerous prisoners, rotating assignments in Court Holding seems to be beneficial. This procedure enables deputies to remain alert and fresh while gaining valuable experience.
6. Equipment for recording and storing video of holding cell activity would be useful for training and evidence gathering purposes.

Recommendations

1. The Grand Jury recommends equipment be purchased for video recording activity in all areas of the Court Holding facility, and space found to store equipment and recordings. While this recommendation was previously made in the 2006-2007 Grand Jury report — and the Sheriff’s Office agreed — it has yet to be implemented.

Commendations

1. The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff’s Office for its professional and well-trained staff.
2. The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff’s Office for the new inmate restraint policy.
3. The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff’s Office for moving drug cases to the Main Courthouse.
4. The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff’s Office for the policy of rotating deputies in Court Holding.

Responses Required

Respondent	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within / Respond By
County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors	10	1	60 days September 1, 2008
County of Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Office	10	1	60 days September 1, 2008

Sources

State of California, California Code of Regulations, Title 15. Crime Prevention and Corrections.

http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/Title15-2007.pdf

Interviews with Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office Personnel