



SPECIAL REPORT

Inmate Services and
Conditions of Custody in
Saskatchewan
Correctional Centres

October 2002

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Regina Provincial
Correctional Centre



Regina Correctional Centre

Introduction

The building is old, it is not suitable for a modern correctional facility, it's the only facility we have here in Regina so consequently we have no choice but to use it... There is no doubt that the Regina facility, the main facility is old, it needs to be replaced.

Chris Axworthy, Saskatchewan Justice Minister, June 11, 2001, CTV

This section of the review addresses conditions in the main complex of the Regina Correctional Centre, which comprises the following connected

designed to be more open, with the cells on the outside walls and a large common area between the two rows of cells.

By 1980, Corrections had adopted the Living Unit concept, which was reflected in the newly constructed correctional centres in Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Staff members were now called "corrections workers." The cells for general population inmates in these two centres have doors instead of bars, common areas are larger, and the arrangement of cells in a circle around a central control area facilitates more interaction between staff and inmates. In 1988, three new living units were added to the Regina centre, all

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structures: Administration Building, Units 1, 2 and 3 cell blocks, link structure (which includes the North G dormitory for short-term inmates), kitchen/ laundry/ boiler room, and gymnasium.

The Administration Building, Unit 1 and the link structure were built in 1913. Unit 2, which was built in 1962, was the first addition to the original structure. It houses remand inmates and contains additional administration offices. Units 3 and 4, a new kitchen/ laundry/ boiler room, and more administration offices were added in 1964. The New Living Units, which are separate from the main complex, were added in 1988.

Differences in correctional philosophy are reflected in the building design. In 1913, there was a strong emphasis on isolation and supervision. Staff members were referred to as "guards." This philosophy persisted until roughly the 1960s. As a result, the arrangement of cells and the design of cells in Units 2 and 3 are not substantially different than in Unit 1. Unit 4 was

built along the same lines as units in Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

Current correctional philosophy in Saskatchewan emphasizes rehabilitation through programming and reintegration into society through normal living routines in the correctional centres. Corrections workers' responsibilities are no longer restricted to supervising inmates and now include ensuring that inmates are directed to appropriate programming and receive any other supports that are necessary for rehabilitation. This requires much more communication and contact than was previously the case. The new living units are designed to facilitate normal living routines and increased interaction between corrections workers and inmates. As will be seen, the designs of the buildings that make up the main complex do not support current corrections philosophy and arguably work against it.

The facilities in which inmates live can adversely affect the institution's rehabilitative efforts and can also affect inmates' willingness to cooperate



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with those rehabilitative efforts. A facility that seems punitive because of its starkness and lack of amenities sends a mixed message to inmates regarding whether they are being punished or rehabilitated. Furthermore, facilities that inhibit staff members' interaction with inmates, have inadequate space for classrooms, and compromise inmate safety compromise Corrections' ability to provide effective rehabilitative programming. The main complex of the Regina Correctional Centre falls short in all of these areas.

Cell Blocks

The four cell blocks in the main complex differ in age and design. While there are problems that are common to all four, there are also significant differences. To better emphasize the problems unique to each cell block, each one is discussed separately.

Unit 1

Unit 1, which consists of four levels of cells, is the oldest cell block in the main complex. Unit 1 shows signs of its age and inappropriateness as a modern correctional facility more than the other three units in the main complex.

Ventilation is poor and, according to a 1998 report by a private consultant, does not meet Occupational Health and Safety Regulations.¹ There is no insulation in the walls, and the heating system needs upgrading. None of the windows open, and as a result, temperature control is poor.

Inmates complain that the cells are too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. The washers and dryers at the end of each corridor are not vented to the outside, which results in excessive humidity and objectionable odours.

Corrections workers in Unit 1 occupy offices at the end of each corridor. This provides a direct line of sight down the corridor but not into the

individual cells. Because of the length of the corridor and inadequate lighting, staff members in the office cannot clearly see what is going on at the end.

Visibility is particularly bad in 1E and 1F. The corridors on both these units are catwalks about four feet wide. If inmates are using the phone at the front of the corridor, it is not possible for staff to see down to the end. Furthermore, the common room at the end of the corridor is somewhat concealed from view by the bars along the corridor. The poor visibility and inability to see directly into inmates' cells or the common room increases the vulnerability of both staff members and inmates.

The toilets and sinks in Unit 1 are primarily vitreous china. Because of their age, many are cracked and stained. In the high security units, they are occasionally smashed and used to break through walls or to fashion weapons.

Drains from the toilets run into several interceptors that are designed to catch large objects such as blankets and pillowcases that would obstruct the line. It is not an uncommon occurrence for these interceptors to overflow, which results in a stench being spread throughout the entire unit.

The plumbing and electrical tunnel that runs down the length of Unit 1 between the two rows of cells on each floor has been accumulating dust and other debris on the pipes and wires for decades. Air that is vented into the inmates' cells passes through the tunnel, and the health risk this poses is considerable.

The electrical system for Unit 1 was last updated in 1964 and is now barely adequate. Because of the risk of overloading the system, the centre cannot provide inmates with microwaves or toasters, which are provided to inmates in the newer units. While this may seem to some to be a small matter, it is one more instance of the

¹ Internal document, prepared by private consultant, 1998.



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deprivations in Unit 1 that inmates in the newer units do not face.

The cell locks in Unit 1 are the original locks, and parts have long since ceased to be available. When a lock fails, replacement parts have to be manufactured. The danger in this situation is that no one knows when a lock is going to fail. In 2001, an inmate committed suicide in Unit 1 and staff could not get inside the cell because the lock failed. In this instance the inmate had already died, but in another instance, such as a suicide attempt, fire or medical emergency, a failed lock could well be the difference between life and death.

In the newer units, inmates enjoy at least limited privacy in their cells. In Unit 1 there is very little privacy. All of the cells have bars across the front, which facilitates visual monitoring but provides no privacy. This is degrading and humiliating for inmates who can be observed while they are using the toilet or changing their clothes, sometimes by female staff.

The situation is worse in the East G high-security cells. In response to the problem of inmates throwing things (soup, coffee, urine, feces) at the corrections staff, plexiglas sheets were attached to the front of the cells in the winter of 2001. This solved one problem but has created others. Air circulation was poor to begin with and is now worse. It remains to be seen what effect high temperatures will have. Nurses can no longer pass medication through the bars and watch the inmates to make sure they swallow them. Nurses either have to reach below or above the plexiglas, and there is sufficient unobserved time for an inmate to hide his medication. Finally, the plexiglas is already showing signs of wear, which makes it difficult to see inside the cells.

Staff interaction with inmates is an integral part of Corrections' rehabilitative plan. In Unit 1, the opportunities for interaction are limited. For security purposes, two staff members supervise one side of each level of cells. Once every hour, one of the workers walks down the unit to make sure everything is okay inside the cells, while the other waits at the end gate in case anything happens.



The corrections worker walking the corridor could talk to inmates, but the barred cells and narrow corridor leave little room for private conversations.

Conditions on Unit 1 are bad enough for inmates who are allowed several hours out-of-cell time to visit, make phone calls, or exercise, but on the East G, West G, and 1B units, inmates are confined to their cells for 23 ½ hours per day. Besides bordering on cruelty, this violates the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules, which call for a minimum of one hour of exercise in the open air each day.

Unit 2

Although Unit 2 is fifty-one years newer than Unit 1, conditions are scarcely any better and some are worse. To the centre's credit, the utilities tunnel was thoroughly cleaned of dust and debris in early 2002. However, Unit 2 shares the same problems with ventilation, temperature control, privacy, overflowing interceptors, absence of exhaust vents for washers and dryers and barred cells. Visibility and staff interaction with inmates is arguably worse. Unit 2 is a rectangular structure with three levels of cells on one side separated by a wall from offices on the other side. Access to the three levels is by scissor stairs that have a small landing at each level. There is no room for staff on the landing without blocking the



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stairs so staff occupy one of the offices on the other side and watch inmates remotely through video monitors. Once every hour, one of the two staff members who supervise this unit walks down each corridor, while the other stands at the end. In these circumstances, there is almost no interaction between staff and inmates and staff are limited in their ability to supervise the inmates. The video monitors do not permit a clear view of the end of each unit, and trying to watch three video monitors quickly results in fatigue. There is the added problem that when staff members are walking the corridors, two of the units are unsupervised. We commonly get complaints from remand inmates that they are being threatened or bullied by other inmates. The centre is aware of the problem, but short of building a new facility is limited in its ability to resolve it.

Unit 3

Unit 3 also has problems with temperature control (although not as bad as Unit 4), visibility, privacy, no exhaust vents for the washer or dryer, and limited opportunity for private conversations between inmates and staff.

Unit 4

Unit 4 was no doubt considered progressive when it was built in 1964, but due to design problems is now used only as a last resort.

None of the cells have toilets; showers and toilets are in a common area. If inmates were always free to come and go from their cells this would not present a problem, but cells are locked at night and there are often times when the entire unit has to be locked down for an investigation. In these circumstances, inmates have to ask staff for permission to use the wash-room. Some requests are legitimate, while others are not. This game inevitably raises tensions.

There is no insulation in the walls of Unit 4, and the cells are built above a six-foot overhang. As a result, temperature control is almost impossible. Temperature can get so extreme in the cells that the centre has written policy making an exception to the rule that cells are to be locked at night. When it is particularly cold or hot outside, the cell doors are left open to allow the cells to cool or warm to the inside temperature.

North G

The North G dormitory in the basement of the Main Complex houses short-term inmates and a few who are completing the last few weeks of their sentence. In 2000, pictures of the unit were published in the press, revealing deplorable conditions.² The director did not deny the conditions that were depicted. The picture showed walls that were crumbling and badly in need of paint, and a former inmate reported that bugs and rodents were common sights on the unit. Since then, the centre has repaired the walls and painted the unit.

Despite the improvements, however, it still reminds one of a basement cellar. The few windows in the unit are high on the wall, providing a view of the wall of the Remand Unit and the sky. Lighting is poor and privacy is extremely limited.

² Mike O'Brien, "Criticism of Regina Jail Continues," *Leader Post* (June 16, 2000).



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Interaction with staff is minimal. Since inmates in this unit are serving short sentences there are essentially no programming opportunities for them. Inmates in North G are basically being warehoused for the duration of their sentences.

Vermin

Prior to 2002, we commonly received complaints about rodents and bugs in the main complex and there were occasional reports in the media. At this point, we do not know if the reports were exaggerated but we do know that the centre was having problems with cockroaches, mice and

The Code calls for at least two exits on all the corridors, yet the corridors have only one exit. To make matters worse, the washer and dryer are often located just inside the exit. This is the most likely place for a fire to start, and there is a risk the fire could block the exit. Fire barriers that are designed to prevent or inhibit the spread of fire from floor to floor or room to room are absent.

Despite the glaring deficiencies, Corrections is not violating the Code, as it does not apply retroactively. Generally speaking, the buildings that make up the main complex only have to comply with standards that were current when

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rats. To the centre's credit, it launched a major cockroach reduction effort in 2001, which included bringing in an exterminator once a month. It also started providing all units with mousetraps.

Complaints about rodents and mice have dropped substantially, although some complaints will no doubt continue. The facility is located in the middle of agricultural land about one mile east of the city landfill and there are many entrance points in the old buildings for bugs and rodents.

Fire/Emergency Preparedness

With respect to the National Fire Code, several deficiencies have been identified in the main complex. There is no sprinkler system, except over the ranges in the kitchen. The Code calls for smoke detectors in all the cells and corridors but there are none. The main complex does not have an alarm system that meets National Fire Code specifications.

they were built. There are exceptions in the case of obvious hazards, and renovations or additions must comply with the Code.

Fortunately, the situation is not quite as bad as it appears. To meet the deficiencies in fire safety, the Regina Correctional Centre, in cooperation with the Provincial Fire Commission, has established a fire safety plan that the Commission describes as excellent. At present, the Commission is satisfied that notwithstanding the condition and design of the Main Complex, the fire safety plan raises the level of fire safety to a level that is acceptable to the Commission.

Nonetheless, even the best planning can fail in the face of panic. And if the planning fails, the result could be very grim.

COMMENDATION

+ For recognizing and addressing fire safety risks through the development of a fire safety plan.



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Building conditions

According to a report prepared by a private consultant for the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation in 1998, none of the buildings that make up the main complex met the standards set by *The Uniform Buildings and Accessibility Standards Act* and *The National Building Code 1995*. The report discusses many deficiencies pertaining to plumbing, electrical, mechanical, and structural systems.

In many cases, systems have passed their expected life span and no longer meet standards. Conditions in the part of the facility built in 1913 have deteriorated to the point that the study recommends replacement of the entire structure as more cost effective than renovations. The cost of renovations to bring the main complex up to current standards was estimated at approximately eleven and a half million dollars.

There has been a recent and significant improvement to the kitchen facilities which deserves special mention. Corrections, with guidance from the departments of Health and Labour, bought new equipment and brought the kitchen facility up to current building and health standards. This project was undertaken in 2001.

COMMENDATION

+ For bringing the kitchen up to current building and health standards.

Conclusion

Even a casual observer of conditions in the main complex of the Regina Correctional Centre can not help but be struck by the oppressive atmosphere created by clanging metal gates, barred cells, overcrowding, chipped and peeling paint, poor lighting and cramped quarters on the units. This is compounded by the inevitable increase in tension that results when staff and inmates are forced by the nature of the facility's design to limit their interaction.

A closer examination reveals a facility that no longer meets acceptable standards. Rather than assisting Corrections' rehabilitative efforts, the facility hinders them.

We believe that in fairness to both staff and inmates and in the best interests of public safety, the facility should either be brought up to current standards or replaced.

COMMENDATION

+ For the Regina Correctional Centre's genuine effort to comply with progressive correctional philosophy despite the challenges presented by inadequate and inappropriate facilities in the old part of the centre.

RECOMMENDATION

+ Bring the Main Complex of the Regina Correctional Centre up to current building standards or build a new facility.



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COMMENDATIONS

- + For recognizing and addressing fire safety risks through the development of a fire safety plan.
- + For bringing the kitchen up to current building and health standards.
- + For the Regina Correctional Centre's genuine effort to comply with progressive correctional philosophy despite the challenges presented by inadequate and inappropriate facilities in the old part of the centre.