

Court Holding Facility — Watsonville

Background

The Court Holding facility in Watsonville is located within the new courthouse at One Second Street. On February 25, 2008, the courthouse was opened to misdemeanor hearings. Felony cases were added on March 17, and family law on April 7. Members of the Grand Jury visited this facility on March 20, 2008.

Findings

1. The Court Holding facility is new, clean and in excellent condition. The walls are cinder block and painted pale yellow. The floors are linoleum and the sink and toilet areas are stainless steel. Corridors are well lit.
2. In addition to family law cases for the entire county, all south county criminal cases from Freedom Boulevard at Highway One to the Monterey County border are heard in the Watsonville courthouse. The boundary for criminal matters may be extended further north in the future.
3. An officer controls the exterior entrance to Court Holding, which is not accessible to the public.
4. Staff may enter the Court Holding area from the side sally port¹ doors located in the main entrance lobby.
5. All Court Holding doorways and inmate holding cells have audio and visual surveillance.
6. Access is monitored and regulated from a secure room called the control center. All doors within Court Holding are controlled from this center and the security system allows only one door to be opened at a time. The control center is staffed by a single officer Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or until the courts are closed for the day.
7. Law enforcement officers are not allowed to bring their firearms into Court Holding; they must secure them in lock boxes in the sally port area.
8. Adult inmates are brought to Court Holding from other county detention facilities in a transport van. The van has three compartments to allow for separation of inmates according to classification, with a maximum capacity of 13 inmates. Juveniles are transported alone, either by a deputy in a squad car or in the van. Moving of inmates begins as early as 6:00 a.m. The van makes two round trips per day from the Main Jail and Rountree facilities. Because one van isn't enough, Watsonville Court Holding relies on Santa Cruz vans to help transport the Court Holding inmates.
9. Transport vans carrying inmates enter the courthouse garage through a vehicle sally port. Within the secure area there is room for up to three vans.

¹ A sally port is an enclosed area secured by locked doors at each end, only one of which can be opened at any one time.

10. Within the garage there is a ramp for disabled inmates to leave the van and enter the facility.
11. There are two separate pedestrian sally ports leading from the garage into the Court Holding area, one for officers and one for inmates.
12. Most detainees are brought to Court Holding in ankle and wrist restraints and remain in restraints until they are returned to their detention facility. Minimum-security inmates from the Rountree Detention Facility wear only ankle restraints.
13. As of April 7th ten officers staff the fully operational facility.
14. Court Holding is expected to handle an average of 24 inmates per day. The maximum capacity of the facility is 48 per day.
15. The six holding cells are designated for inmates with specific classifications:
 - General population
 - Females
 - Juveniles
 - Special needs (requiring wheel chair access)
 - Administrative segregation – Sureños
 - Administrative segregation – Norteños
16. Each holding cell has a door with a window, a sink, and a toilet. Unlike Santa Cruz Court Holding, inmates can flush the toilets from inside the cell.
17. Correctional Officers physically check all holding cells every 30 minutes, except the juvenile cell, which they check every 15 minutes.
18. The window to the holding cell designated for juveniles is covered by a metal plate to ensure sight and sound separation from the rest of the facility.
19. All cells are monitored by surveillance cameras. However, view of the toilet areas is blocked.
20. A decontamination shower is available should an inmate be pepper sprayed.
21. Audio communication buttons and red panic buttons are located throughout the Court Holding hallways, providing direct communication with the control room.
22. Two elevators provide direct access to the third floor courtrooms. One elevator accesses courtrooms A and B, the other C and D.
23. All inmates are escorted to court by a correctional officer. Inmates must stand facing the wall when in the elevator. Each elevator has video and audio surveillance, and a panic button, which if pressed causes the elevator to go to the first floor and the doors to open automatically.
24. There are instances when an officer such as a bailiff, who does carry a firearm while in court, wishes to enter Court Holding via an elevator from a courtroom. That officer must first secure the firearm in a locker located outside the courtrooms on the third floor.

Conclusions

1. An additional van would be beneficial to facilitate more efficient transportation of inmates to the Court Holding facility.
2. This Court Holding facility has provided appropriate inmate separation according to classification.
3. The facility has incorporated the latest security features for maximum protection of the inmates, staff members and the public.

Recommendations

1. The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff’s Office allocate funds for an additional van and correctional officer for transporting inmates to this south county facility.

Responses Required

Respondent	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within / Respond By
County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors	8	1	60 days September 1, 2008
County of Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Office	8	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

