

**Main Jail Inspection Report**  
No Room at the Inn

2013-2014 Santa Cruz County Grand Jury  
June 2014

## **Summary**

The 2013-2014 Grand Jury inspected the Santa Cruz County Main Jail, the Rountree Men's Facility, the Blaine Street Women's Facility, and Juvenile Hall.

Ensuring adequate health and safety in detention facilities is an ongoing challenge for the Sheriff's Office staff and medical personnel. The increasing number of inmates with mental health and drug-related concerns requires a heightened level of staff attention, while mandatory Corrections Officer (CO) furloughs and budget issues limit the number of staff in the Main Jail. In addition, overcrowded housing conditions and inconsistent disciplinary practices create safety risks, health problems, and increased demands on the Main Jail staff.

Because the Main Jail is overcrowded and has seen an increase in the number of inmates with health and drug-related issues, we focused our attention on that facility. Our inspections and interviews revealed conditions that still need improvement as well as conditions that have been improved at the Main Jail. The conditions that need improvement include overcrowded housing, unsafe security conditions, and inadequate staffing. We also observed inmate violations of rules and regulations.

On the positive side, we learned during our inspection that jail management has recently appointed a new Compliance Officer to ensure staff adherence to protocols and procedures. In addition, the three primary agencies responsible for inmate care, the Sheriff's Office, California Forensic Medical Group (CFMG), and the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), reported that they are working well together to improve conditions at the Main Jail.

## **Background**

The Grand Jury is required by statute to inspect correctional facilities in the county each year.

## **Scope**

The Grand Jury reviewed the Sheriff's Office, CFMG, and CIT policies and procedures designed to ensure the health and safety of inmates. We also conducted interviews with corrections staff, CFMG, and CIT staff members. In addition, we made several site visits as listed in the following table.

### ***Jail Inspections***

<b><i>Facility</i></b>	<b><i>Address</i></b>	<b><i>Visit Date(s)</i></b>
Santa Cruz County Main Jail	259 Water Street Santa Cruz, CA 95060	8/29/13, 1/27/14
Blaine Street Women's Facility	141 Blaine Street Santa Cruz, CA 95060	10/10/13
Rountree Men's Medium Facility	90 Rountree Lane Watsonville, CA 95076	10/17/13
Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall	3650 Graham Hill Road Felton, CA 95018	9/25/13, 12/11/13

### **Investigation**

The Main Jail has 16 housing units with a total rated capacity of 311 inmates. The inmates are classified as minimum, medium, or maximum security risks. Additionally, the inmates are segregated by gender, gang affiliation, disciplinary requirements, medical issues, and protective custody needs.

### **Facility Inspection**

During our inspection, we noted that the exterior concrete walls at the rear of the Main Jail were extremely dirty. We also noticed a ceiling vent encrusted with dust in the medical clinic which could pose a health risk to the medical staff and inmates. Aside from these issues, the jail appeared clean and inmates were observed mopping floors during our inspection.

We also noted that the view from the camera in the booking area was partially obstructed by a metal detector. In addition, there was no remote video camera in the medical clinic that would enable corrections officers to monitor inmates in the clinic.

An inspection of the kitchen revealed a clean, well-managed meal preparation area. Though the kitchen was originally designed to feed only 92 inmates, the Sheriff's Office remodeled it and made protocol adjustments to enable the cooks to prepare meals for the higher numbers of inmates now being housed. Food service personnel have been able to keep food costs low. They report an average cost per tray of \$1.56, and they buy food locally whenever possible.

### **Overcrowding Issues**

During our inspections, we noted that the housing unit for short-term, minimum security inmates and inmates awaiting arraignment was disproportionately overcrowded compared

to other housing units. In 2013, the Main Jail's monthly number of inmates was always over capacity, ranging from a low of 29 to a high of 100 inmates. The Sheriff's Office is currently developing plans to expand the Rountree Facility to help alleviate overcrowded conditions at the Main Jail. Many public and private agencies have published research indicating that overcrowding increases stress on inmates, as well as on the corrections staff, and contributes to both violent inmate behavior and general health concerns.<sup>[1] [2] [3] [4]</sup>

### **Inmate Classification System**

Inmates are classified at intake according to the severity of the charges against them and their responses to an intake questionnaire. The inmate classification system sometimes results in an uneven distribution of the jail population, causing overcrowding in some housing units and underuse of others. Unless inmates have gang affiliations, mental illness, or ethnic or racial biases, they are housed in the general population until arraignment. During one visit, we observed that a general population housing unit designed for 18 inmates contained 40 inmates, some of whom were sleeping on the day room floor in temporary plastic beds referred to as "boats." In contrast, we found that a unit used for Administrative Segregation originally designed for 14 held only 10 inmates.

### **Custody Alternatives Program**

California AB 109 is a law enacted in 2011 in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's order to reduce the number of inmates in state prisons by sending new low-level offenders to county jails. In 2013 the Santa Cruz Sentinel reported that the Custody Alternatives Program (CAP), run by the Sheriff's Office, received a Merit Award from the California State Association of Counties. It was one of several AB 109 related programs around the state that received an award. In response to the award Sheriff Wowak said, "The CAP program was implemented to address the redistribution of offenders in state prison to their local jurisdiction while still maintaining high standards of public safety. We were very pleased to be honored." David Liebler, California State Association of Counties deputy director for public affairs, said of the award, "Essentially it was created to recognize the most innovative programs that counties organize and develop. They really look at how replicable a program could be."<sup>[5]</sup>

The CAP program provides work release and electronic monitoring alternatives for both AB 109 inmates and other non-violent offenders who pose a minimal risk to the community. According to the Sheriff's Office, the Electronic Monitoring Program is appropriate for offenders who have special situations or needs that are better handled in their home environment. Participants are allowed to work, and to go to school, counseling, and other necessary appointments, while under close supervision by corrections personnel.

Data provided by the Sheriff's Office indicate there were a total of 392 CAP participants in 2013. The CAP program saved a total of 18,641 days during which offenders were not incarcerated at the Main Jail. At an estimated cost of incarceration of \$82 per day per inmate, CAP officials estimated the 2013 cost saving to the Sheriff's Office to be more than \$1.5 million.

## **Staffing**

In the South wing of the Main Jail, there are four housing units arranged around a workstation staffed by one CO. During our visit, when that CO went into one of the four housing units to perform the mandatory hourly safety check, he notified Central Control (CC) and left the workstation unattended. While in the housing unit, the CO was greatly outnumbered by inmates and did not have a back-up CO in the entire wing.

Central Control monitors most of the jail by video surveillance and also controls all entries and exits. We visited CC twice during the day shift and on one of those occasions, we noted that only one CO was staffing it.

Corrections Officers are also required to accompany inmates on court appearances. This is a time-consuming process. The Sheriff's Office is now exploring the use of video conferencing from the jail for routine court appearances.

Another consequence of limited staffing is that COs who escort inmates to the medical clinic can't always remain there with the inmate. The medical staff reported safety concerns when some inmates are in the medical clinic without a CO present.

COs reported that staff morale at the Main Jail is low. Multiple factors have contributed to their low morale, including mandatory furloughs and overtime as well as the continuing absence of a new labor contract. All these factors have resulted at least in part from decisions made by the Board of Supervisors. Another problem that has affected morale is the increase in stress on COs caused by the erratic behavior of increasing numbers of inmates with mental health and substance abuse issues.

## **Safety Checks and Contraband**

The Sheriff's Office policies and protocols concerning cell inspections and items permitted in cells are summarized below:

1. Safety checks should be conducted at least once an hour. Officers should observe the inmate through the cell window, see visible skin, and verify that the inmate is breathing. COs should document their check using the Pipe Log, an electronic reader that is swiped at stations located throughout the jail.
2. Inmates are not allowed to place anything on doors, windows, or walls in their cells. No items are to be thrown on the floor of the cell. No food may be stored in a cell.

The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) 2012-2014 biennial inspection found that the Main Jail was not in compliance with the section on safety checks and required a corrective action plan to correct safety check deficiencies. Staffing also was not compliant with the section regarding number of personnel. On 10/16/13, a BSCC team re-examined the Main Jail's safety check documentation and wrote, "While improvement is still needed, the safety check documentation that we examined does not rise to the level of non-compliance."<sup>[6]</sup>

The Grand Jury confirmed that current CO supervisors and management at the Main Jail

have increased their focus on the importance of safety check compliance. Management has instituted a daily review of the Pipe Logs. CO supervisors are required to accompany the on-duty housing CO once daily in at least one housing unit safety check.

While safety check compliance has improved, COs and management have not applied the same enforcement to the policy prohibiting certain items on cell walls and windows or in cells. During one of our visits, we observed posters on cell walls, towels blocking cell door windows, and food and empty food containers in cells, all against jail policy. Posters and towels can be used to hide prohibited materials. COs stated that they sometimes have to “pick their battles” when dealing with policy violators. During one visit, a CO ordered inmates to remove posters from their cell walls and then told us that the inmates would simply put them back up when we were gone.

### **Orientation and Discipline of Inmates**

During our inspections, we did not see any posted rules or regulations for inmates in the housing units we toured. When we questioned COs and administrators regarding the orientation material available to inmates, we received conflicting accounts. We were told there was an orientation pamphlet, yet we also were told there was no written material. An orientation video on inmate rules and regulations was provided to the Grand Jury. According to COs, this video is broadcast daily at 3pm on the Main Jail televisions. Corrections Bureau management reported that plans are underway to create a posting area for written rules and regulations in each unit.

When inmates are found in violation of the rules, COs take disciplinary actions. The following table indicates a sharp rise in the number of recorded incidents for the months of January and February 2014. A new Compliance Officer was appointed in December 2013 but it is unclear if the upswing in reported incidents is related to the creation of this position.

#### ***Incidents and Selected Disciplinary Sanctions***

<b><i>Month</i></b>	<b><i>Total Incidents</i></b>	<b><i>Warnings</i></b>	<b><i>Loss of commissary</i></b>	<b><i>Loss of visits</i></b>	<b><i>Billed for actions</i></b>
Jan 2013	69	10	5	8	22
Feb 2013	114	14	14	3	30
Oct 2013	147	44	82	8	8
Jan 2014	225	66	78	45	26
Feb 2014	287	73	63	60	76

## **Crisis Intervention Team**

With an increase in the number of inmates with mental health issues, mental health services at the jail have become even more critical. The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), a unit within the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency (HSA), provides mental health services to inmates who are a risk to themselves or others, or have other psychiatric symptoms. The personnel we spoke with at CIT, as well as Corrections and CFMG staff, estimate that 25% of all inmates held at the Main Jail suffer from a mental illness for which they receive psychotropic medication.

CIT staff members respond to requests from CFMG personnel and COs to assess inmates who may be in need of their services. They also provide a one hour orientation session for new COs and an annual two hour training session for continuing COs. In an effort to assist inmates, Crisis Intervention Specialists and interns have established inmate support and activity groups.

The Santa Cruz County HSA inspection of Main Jail CIT took place in December 2013. This was the first time since January 2010 that this mandatory annual inspection had been performed. Section 1210 of the inspection report addresses individual treatment plans and reads, "Treatment staff develops a written individualized plan for each inmate treated by medical and/or mental health staff." The HSA inspector marked "No" and commented "In development." Section 1219 covers the Suicide Prevention Program. Inspectors check to see if "there is a written suicide prevention plan designed to identify, monitor, and provide treatment for those inmates who present a suicide risk." The inspector marked "No" and commented, "Under development; utilizing a risk assessment tool."<sup>[7]</sup>

CIT staff members are currently developing a manual to provide specific instructions regarding medical protocols and documentation guidelines. They are also improving their log and record keeping procedures. HSA has only budgeted for a half-time supervisor position to oversee daily CIT operations. CIT is limited in the amount of counseling time it can provide for inmates with only a half-time supervisor and minimal clerical support at the Main Jail.

## **Findings**

- F1.** Overcrowded conditions in Main Jail housing units make it difficult for COs to follow their policies and to monitor inmate safety.
- F2.** Staff furloughs, mandatory overtime, and the impasse in CO labor contract negotiations have lowered CO morale.
- F3.** The lack of consistent enforcement of rules and regulations by COs at the Main Jail creates opportunities for inmates to hide prohibited materials.
- F4.** Medical staff members are vulnerable when COs do not remain in the medical clinic with inmates.

**F5.** An air vent in the Main Jail medical clinic is excessively dirty and in need of immediate maintenance.

**F6.** Record keeping tasks and on-going clerical work decrease CIT's counseling time with inmates.

**F7.** Inmate safety has been at risk because CIT has not had a comprehensive protocol manual or individualized inmate treatment plans at the Main Jail.

**F8.** There is no adequate process in place at the Main Jail to communicate jail rules to inmates and verify that they are aware of them.

**F9.** Video surveillance is inadequate for the booking area and the medical clinic in the Main Jail.

## **Recommendations**

**R1.** The Sheriff's Office should expand the Custody Alternatives Program (CAP) to relieve jail overcrowding. (F1)

**R2.** The Board of Supervisors should eliminate furloughs and mandatory overtime for Corrections Officers in order to improve their morale. (F2)

**R3.** The Board of Supervisors should negotiate a new contract with the Corrections Officers union by the end of 2014. (F2)

**R4.** The Sheriff's Office should ensure that Main Jail CO supervisors and their management consistently enforce inmate rules. (F3)

**R5.** The Sheriff's Office should require a CO to remain in the Main Jail medical clinic while inmates are being treated unless the CO is released by the medical staff. (F4)

**R6.** The Sheriff's Office should ensure that the air vent in the Main Jail medical clinic is cleaned and maintained. (F5)

**R7.** HSA should increase hours for the CIT supervisor at the Main Jail and increase clerical support for CIT staff. (F6)

**R8.** CIT should complete a protocol manual and develop individualized treatment plans for inmates at the Main Jail. (F7)

**R9.** The Sheriff's Office should provide inmates with written jail rules at intake and document that inmates have received them. (F8)

**R10.** The Sheriff's Office should install video surveillance in the medical clinic and correct the obstructed video surveillance of the open seating booking area. (F9)



## Commendations

**C1.** We commend the Sheriff’s Office for evaluating the feasibility of using video conferencing for routine court appearances to reduce the need for CO escorts.

**C2.** We commend the Sheriff’s Office for its plan to expand and improve the Rountree Facility to help alleviate overcrowded conditions at the Main Jail.

**C3.** We commend the Main Jail kitchen staff for their well managed food service program.

## Responses Required

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Respond Within/ Respond By</i>
Santa Cruz County Sheriff-Coroner	F1-5, F8, F9	R1, R4-6, R9, R10	60 Days 8/18/14
Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency	F6, F7	R7, R8	90 Days 9/15/14
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	F1, F2	R2, R3	90 Days 9/15/14

## Definitions

- *AB 109:* A law enacted in 2011 in response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s order to reduce the number of inmates in state prisons to 137.5% of the original design capacity by sending new low-level offenders to county jails.
- *Administrative Segregation:* When inmates are segregated from the general population due to an assessed risk of violent or disruptive behavior, either by them or directed against them.
- *Boats:* Temporary beds used for inmates when the population exceeds the maximum capacity of the facility. The boat-shaped plastic bed sits directly on the floor within a cell block.
- *Booking area:* The location where the booking process occurs. Typically this is where individuals are searched for contraband, photographed, fingerprinted and have their information and charges entered into a computer. They are then classified and are either assigned housing or released for later processing.
- *CAP:* Custody Alternative Program. The CAP program provides work release and electronic monitoring alternatives for both AB 109 inmates and other non-violent offenders who pose a minimal risk to the community.
- *CC:* Central Control. The central communication and monitoring area in the Main Jail from which COs control access for all locked doors, maintain communications with other COs, and monitor video feeds from areas throughout the jail.

- CO: Corrections Officer.
- *Commissary*: A store that sells food and basic supplies in a jail or prison.
- *Day Room Floor*: A central recreation area in each housing unit.
- *Pipe Log*: The electronic management report of the times at which COs document their presence at each station on their rounds by swiping an electronic reader.

## Sources

### References

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4. Lichten, Richard. 2011. "Overcrowded Prisons and Officer Safety." *Police and Jail Procedures, Inc*. Accessed 4/19/14. [www.policeandjailprocedures.com/article\\_overcrowded.html](http://www.policeandjailprocedures.com/article_overcrowded.html)
5. Bi.com Blog. 2013. "Santa Cruz County wins 2013 CSAC Challenge Merit Award." Accessed 2/12/14. <http://blog.bi.com/monitoring-operations/santa-cruz-county-wins-2013-csac-challenge-merit-award>
6. The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC). 2013. "2012-2014 Biennial Inspection Report."
7. County of Santa Cruz, Health Services Agency. 2014. "Annual Inspection of the County of Santa Cruz Detention Facilities. 1/21/14."

### Site Visits

Santa Cruz County Main Jail	8/29/13, 1/27/14
Blaine Street Women's Facility	10/10/13
Rountree Men's Medium Facility	10/17/13
Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall	9/25/13, 12/11/13

