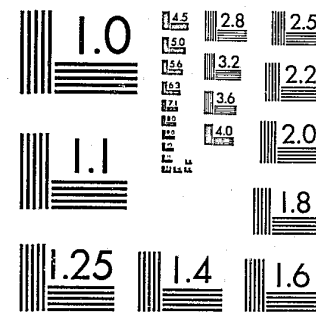


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Federal Probation

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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES COURTS

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This Issue in Brief ACQUISITIONS

Homicides Related to Drug Trafficking.—Homicides as a result of business disputes in the distribution of illegal drugs appears as a new subtype of homicide in the United States, report authors Heffernan, Martin, and Romano. In this exploratory study of 50 homicides in one police precinct in New York City noted for its high level of drug dealing, 42 percent were found to be "drug-related." When compared with non-drug-related homicides in the same precinct, the "drug-related" more often involved firearms and younger, male victims.

Management Theory Z: Implications for Correctional Survival Management.—Increased workload and decreased budgets are realities facing correctional management during the remainder of the 1980's, asserts Dr. William G. Archambeault of Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge. This means that fewer employees must be motivated to produce more and higher quality services. Faced with a similar dilemma, American business and industry have "discovered" Theory Z management and have demonstrated its pragmatic value. This article analyzes the utility of Theory Z in correctional organizations and outlines the steps necessary to implement this approach.

Making Criminals Pay: A Plan for Restitution by Sentencing Commissions.—Attorney Frederic R. Kellogg writes that the recent controversy over the insanity defense has focused public doubt over the criminal justice system. It highlights the need not for further tinkering but for wholesale reform. This recent proposal would classify offenses according to harm and enforce restitution in every case. It would sweep away the entire uncoordinated panoply of postconviction proceedings and replace them with a well-staffed sentencing commission of experienced trial judges whose assignment would be to assess the harm done by the of-

fender and collect judgment to repay the victim and the state.

Information Processing in a Probation Office: The Southern District of Georgia Experience.—Chief Probation Officer Jerry P. Morgan believes there is a place for word/information processing in the probation office. In establishing a system in the Southern District of Georgia, local sentence comparison became the first project followed by

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Fire Safety in Jails

Planning for Emergencies

BY N. E. SCHAFER, PH.D.

School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, Indianapolis

WITHIN a 15-day period in the summer of 1977, 68 people died in jail and prison fires. On June 21, a fire in the St. Johns Detention Centre in New Brunswick, Canada, resulted in the deaths of 21 confined prisoners; on June 26, 42 people, 9 of whom were visitors, died in a fire at the Maury County Jail in Tennessee. A short time later, on July 7, 5 prisoners died in a fire at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut. Following a thorough investigation of this last fire the Federal Bureau of Prisons made use of analyses of the fire by replacing potentially hazardous material in all Federal correctional facilities and reviewing and revising fire safety policy throughout the Federal system.

Because jails are not part of a larger system most have not had a similar opportunity to review their fire safety procedures in light of the fatal jail fires of the same year. At the same time jails are the institutions most at risk vis a vis fire fatalities. It is the purpose of this article to assess this special vulnerability of local jails, to review the investigations of the 1977 jail fires, and to pinpoint specific problem areas which jail administrators might consider when formulating fire safety policy.

Standards relating to fire safety in jails have been published, but each jail is unique in terms of size, age, physical plant, personnel, and local context. No specific standards can be appropriate to all jails. The most recent nationally circulated standards are those published by the American Correctional Association. In the volume specifically for jails there are eight standards regarding fire safety:

- compliance with existing codes;
- the services of a qualified fire and safety officer;
- annual inspections;
- automatic fire detection and alarm systems;
- selection of fire safe materials and equipment;
- clearly visible usable permanently marked exits;
- an evacuation plan which incorporates quarterly fire drills

(ACA pp. 41-43)

The importance of these standards is clear when they are considered in conjunction with a review of fatal jail fires.

The Special Vulnerability of Jails

Jails are locally autonomous institutions subject to the control of local government. While some

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states have the responsibility for jail inspection many jail inspectors do not have enforcement powers. Minimum jail budgets, set locally, determine spending priorities and correction of potential fire hazards may not be included in the budget.

Every jail is situated in a unique community and must operate within the confines of its own local context. It is bound by local concerns and dependent upon local resources. The relationship of each jail with agencies in the external community varies from county to county and is subject to change over time. Cooperative relationships with outside agencies can be essential in a fire emergency.

Personnel and management changes are a special jail problem which can impact on the institution's readiness for fire emergencies. The county sheriff is usually the chief administrator of the jail and is also an elected official. In some jurisdictions jail management may change with each election. Major personnel changes may follow and operations policy is also subject to change. Fire safety policy may be in a state of flux for some period of time.

Many jails must deal with the problem of high staff turnover among "on-line" personnel. In counties where jails are staffed by law enforcement officers, promotion to other duties may result in regular changes in jail staff. In addition such personnel are customarily trained in law enforcement rather than jail operation and are naturally eager to assume law enforcement roles. When the staff is a primarily civilian one, low salaries contribute to high staff turnover. Training in fire safety may lag behind rapid personnel changes. In very small counties the role of jailer during some shifts may be assumed by police personnel who also have other duties (e.g., radio dispatcher). This staff member may be required to make hourly checks of the prisoners, but would find it difficult to single handedly effect a rescue of the population if, on one of his rounds, he found a fire in progress.

Another factor which contributes to the jail's special vulnerability to fatal fires is the nature of the prisoners and the nature of their confinement. Most jail prisoners are pretrial detainees who are confined for very brief periods. High prisoner turnover and short periods of confinement mean that jails are primarily concerned with security. As a major security measure most jails severely restrict prisoner movement within the institution, confining prisoners to cells or cell blocks. In a fire emergency these securely confined prisoners are unable to participate in their own rescue or to cooperate in fire suppression efforts.

Local relationships and resources, limited budgets, changes in administrative and line personnel, and necessary security measures combine to make county jails the most vulnerable of all correctional institutions to loss of life in a fire emergency.

The 1977 Jail Fires

Because of the extraordinary loss of life involved, the fires in the St. Johns Detention Centre and in the Maury County Jail have both been thoroughly investigated. Both were deliberately set and in both dense smoke contributed to the inability of either jail or fire department personnel to reach and rescue confined prisoners.

The St. Johns Detention Centre was on the lobby level of the 16-story high-rise City Hall. Access to the detention center was from the City Hall lobby and from a below grade parking lot. The access areas were within 20 feet of one another some distance from the most populated cell blocks. The Centre contained four cell blocks, a drunk tank, and a padded cell. The tank and three cell blocks were located on a long dead end corridor. While only one key was necessary to open the tank and the padded cell, the cell blocks required two keys, one for each cell block and another for each cell. Alarm and detection systems and manual equipment were present in the Detention Centre.

On the evening of June 21, 1977, an inmate shouted that there was a fire and personnel noted smoke coming from the padded cell in which an unruly prisoner had been placed. When the cell door was opened an in-rush of oxygen caused rapid ignition of gases. Heavy dense smoke from the styrene-butadiene rubber padding quickly filled the jail. Officers rushed to the cell, pulled the prisoner to safety, and activated a manual alarm connected to the fire station.

The fire department's response time was very short. Until a pumper hose could be connected the fire fighters attempted to contain the fire with the available occupant hose, but their efforts proved futile. The hose kinked because of the short distance between its location and the fire source and this impeded proper water discharge. Heavy smoke which made breathing apparatus necessary for rescue attempts also greatly reduced visibility. In the confusion of the fire the jail keys were dropped and the dense smoke slowed their retrieval. This caused a delay in unlocking the cell blocks and cell doors on the long dead end corridor. After the keys were recovered one cell block could not be opened because the extreme heat had

caused the full weight of the steel door to rest on the latch. All prisoners in this cell block were fatalities.

Autopsies showed that smoke inhalation was the cause of death in all 21 prisoner fatalities. Large amounts of particulate matter in the lungs were traced to the foam padding. According to Demers (1978) the fire department was the only external agency involved in prefire planning. He concluded that "strict fuel control, proper means of occupant protection (either evacuation or defend in place), and pre-fire planning and training must be provided" (p. 37).

The Maury County Jail was a single-story building constructed of fire resistant concrete. The interior was finished with non-combustible materials. The building had no automatic or manual alarm system and no occupant fire suppression system. Its fire also originated in the padded cell (styrene-butadiene rubber glued to plywood sheets). A 16-year-old in this cell asked a visitor for a cigarette and a light. Twenty minutes later the visitor notified deputies that the cell was on fire. Deputies came to investigate urging visitors to leave as they did so. When the cell door was opened the jailers were knocked to the floor by a rush of dense black smoke. An alarm was telephoned to the fire department and the visitors began to leave. In the confusion the keys were knocked from a deputy's hands and kicked away. They were not recovered.

Because the keys were lost fire fighters with the help of a local towing firm breached the walls of the jail with sledgehammers and pulled away bars with a tow truck. Survivors were pulled through these breached openings; no confined survivors escaped the fire through the jail doors. Of approximately 63 prisoners and 20 visitors, 33 prisoners and 9 visitors (who had been locked in the cell areas) died of smoke inhalation.

The SBR foam padding constituted a fuel which rapidly produced heavy black smoke once ignited. Confined prisoners and visitors could not be released when the keys were lost. The two exits quickly became unusable because they were not remote from one another. There was no direct alarm system, there were no evacuation plans, and no "in-house" fire suppression equipment was available. Each of these factors contributed to the large number of fatalities.

Fire Safety Issues for County Jails

In both of the 1977 jail fires and in the Federal prison fire 2 weeks later a major contributing fac-

tor in the fatalities was the presence of materials which, when ignited, rapidly created extreme amounts of dense black smoke. Like materials were removed and replaced throughout the Federal prison system, but most jails do not have the resources to test and replace potentially hazardous materials. Gradual removal and replacement may be possible and funds should be sought from county governments to begin a gradual replacement program.

Jail administrators who make a sincere attempt to correct identified fire hazards are not likely to be held personally liable in the event of fire. Where negligence can be shown such suits can be and have been filed (e.g., *Collenburg v. County of Los Angeles*, 1957; *Moore v. Murphy*, 1963; and *Padgett v. Stein*, 1975). Refusal by the county government to appropriate funds to correct known hazards renders the governing body liable rather than the sheriff or jail administrator. A program of gradual replacement can contribute to reduced liability risk and will ultimately result in the elimination of hazardous or toxic materials.

Other steps which may require capital investment are remodeling to assure distance between jail access points, installation of fire suppression equipment, sprinkler systems, smoke detectors and a direct alarm system. Fire suppression equipment should be readily accessible to all staff. In most jails prisoner movement is severely restricted so that it is not necessary to protect this equipment from prisoner sabotage. In the Federal prison fire of 1977 such equipment was present, but was secured from prisoners who had freedom of movement within the housing unit. An occupant hose was present but inaccessible. Failure to achieve early suppression of the blaze was cited by fire personnel as a factor in the fatalities.

Detection systems, alarms and fire fighting apparatus can be costly but there are fire safety precautions which require minimal financial outlays. One is to assign fire safety responsibility to a single individual. Each jail should have one staff member designated as its fire safety officer who is responsible for coordinating all aspects of fire safety planning. This officer should oversee any gradual replacement of materials and any installation of fire safety equipment. He should regularly tour the premises to assure that fire safety is being practiced. Checks should be made of exits and stairwells, of proper storage and disposal of flammable materials, etc. The fire safety officer should also be in charge of formulating fire emergency policies and procedures. These should

revolve around three areas: security, preparation of personnel, and relationships with agencies in the external community. The last of these impacts on the other areas and the fire department is the agency with which the jail has the most crucial relationship for effective fire safety planning.

Security

If jails have a primary reason for existing it is to assure the appearance in court of accused people who are unable to post surety. This responsibility requires that jails concentrate on custody concerns. In an institution which is centrally located, which does not have a defensible perimeter (i.e., is neither walled nor fenced), and in which pretrial detainees are held for relatively short periods of time, the most efficient form of custody is the restriction of prisoner movement within the institution. In many jails prisoners are locked on cell blocks or in their cells 24 hours a day. Restricted prisoner movement enables a small staff to maintain the custody of a large number of prisoners.

In a fire emergency this type of security hampers prisoner rescue. In the Maury County Jail too many keys were necessary to open cell and cell block doors. In both jail fires lost keys hampered or prevented rescue efforts. While key security is of utmost importance to the jail, duplicate keys should be available. They should be kept in a secure place, but their location should be known to staff so they can be made available to fire fighters in the event of a fire emergency.

In the Federal prison fire, standard security procedures led the officer on duty to lock prisoners and staff into the burning unit after one officer was let out to report the fire in progress. This door then jammed making escape impossible. During a fire emergency safety should take precedence over security. The entire prison was walled and/or fenced and procedures should have been altered to permit prisoners to escape to the prison yard. In jails, which usually do not have a secure perimeter, evacuation plans should include securing the evacuation site, but the safety of the prisoners should be the first concern.

Preparation of Personnel

The safety of both staff and prisoners depends on how well-prepared jail personnel are to deal with fire emergencies. Training is essential. Personnel should be trained to handle fire suppression equipment and to activate fire alarms. They should know and understand all fire emergency

procedures and should travel safe evacuation routes in order to become familiar with them. If there is more than one evacuation plan they should know how to choose the safest alternative. Personnel must also thoroughly understand that safety must take precedence over security during a fire emergency. Staff training should be ongoing. Change in fire safety policies call for retraining of jail personnel. In institutions where staff turnover is high ongoing training is essential in order to assure that all personnel are versed in plans and procedures. When there are management changes care should be given to assuring a smooth transition vis a vis fire planning.

Reliance should not be placed on training alone to assure that personnel are prepared to deal with emergencies. Fire safety procedures should be written and disseminated and evacuation procedures should be posted in all crucial areas. Because most jails are autonomous the fire safety officer is unlikely to devise complicated emergency procedures, but this problem may be present in large systems. The fire plan at the Federal Correctional Institution (Danbury) "called for notifying up to 11 different people or departments . . . within the institutions before calling the Danbury Fire Department." (Demers, 1978, p. 42) Even after notification a determination was required by a supervisor that the call was necessary. A direct alarm system corrected this problem at Danbury but the delay contributed to the five fire fatalities. Fire procedures should be clearly written and prominently posted and should call for direct simple action.

Relations With the External Community

No community agency is more important to plans for jail fire safety than the fire department. The jail fire safety officer should form close working relationships with fire department personnel and with state or local fire marshals. Their expertise should be used in all areas of fire planning.

Jails which have the funds for installation of fire suppression equipment, alarms, smoke detectors, sprinkler systems, etc. should consult with fire officials on the type of equipment most appropriate for the facility and on optimal placement of such equipment. Care should be taken to insure that smoke alarms and sprinkler systems are beyond the reach of prisoners in order to prevent both sabotage and false alarms.

In jails where there is concern about the presence of hazardous materials jail administrators can re-

quest that suspect materials be examined and tested by fire officials who should also be consulted about selection of replacements. In all of the major 1977 fires the presence of materials which produced dense smoke once ignited contributed to the fatalities. Another contributing factor was failure to arrest the fires at an early stage. Analysis of suspect materials, a direct alarm system, and onsite fire fighting apparatus could help to prevent jail fire fatalities. Regular review of these precautions is also important.

Official fire inspections should be made at least twice yearly by fire department personnel though quarterly inspections are preferable. Inspections should include: use and storage of flammable materials, analysis of materials used in construction and furnishings, electrical hazards, and testing of onsite equipment. At an early point in the Federal prison fire a prisoner attempted to fight the blaze with a dry chemical extinguisher which malfunctioned. In the St. Johns Detention Centre fire the occupant hose proved unsatisfactory in attempts to arrest the blaze at an early stage, and in another case the occupant hose was locked in a cabinet and inaccessible. It was not used for early fire suppression.

Regular inspections are vital to the safety of both staff and prisoners, but unless the inspector's recommendations are acted upon lives are in jeopardy. It should be the responsibility of the jail fire safety officer to follow through on inspection reports and to correct as many identified problems as possible.

Fire officials can also be helpful in planning or reviewing evacuation procedures. Care must be taken to assure that evacuation routes are planned according to points of fire origin and building ventilation. Alternative routes should be considered. Prisoners should not be evacuated to an in-building or underground dead-end site. Fire and smoke may make such a site as dangerous as the cell blocks themselves. An outdoor site is best, but security is a persistent problem since most jails do not have a defensible perimeter (i.e., are neither walled nor fenced).

Selecting and securing an outside evacuation site may call for formalized relationships with other agencies. Cooperative arrangements for ad-

ditional security could be made with local law enforcement agencies, state police, or even the National Guard. Arrangements should be made in advance and should include communication methods and information for estimating probable response time.

Fire plans might also extend to prior arrangements for supplying food for prisoners at the evacuation site and for housing prisoners if the jail proves uninhabitable. A reciprocal agreement with a neighboring county is one possibility. Transportation of prisoners to the alternate site must also be considered.

While each county jail has its own unique local context, cooperative relationships can be established within that context with various local agencies. Such relationships can be most helpful in the event of a fire emergency.

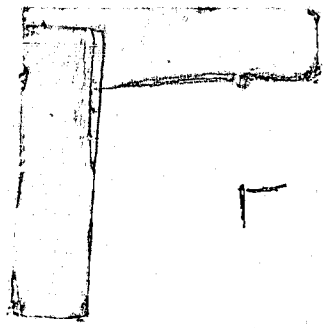
Summary and Conclusion

Jails are especially vulnerable to fatal fires primarily because of limited budgets, type of security maintained, and management and personnel changes which leave fire plans and procedures in a state of flux.

Analysis of other jail fires coupled with evaluation of local jail standards and procedures can help the jail administrator in fire safety planning. Prevention is the most important part of such plans but the potential danger of a fire in an institution where numbers of people are confined must be considered. With the help of local and state fire officials fire prevention can be improved and early suppression of a fire is possible.

In-house fire safety plans should include posting of fire emergency procedures and training of all personnel. All jail staff should be familiar with evacuation routes. Analysis of jail architecture may require that initial evacuation steps (release of prisoners from cells) be undertaken concurrent with efforts to suppress the blaze.

Confusion and panic are probable in all fire emergencies. Careful planning which includes attention to detail (e.g., availability of duplicate keys) and thorough preparation of personnel may prevent the potential loss of life in jail fire emergencies.



END