

18th prison guard assaulted at KRCC this year

Jason Hewlett
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RCMP and the corrections branch are investigating the 18th assault on a prison guard at Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre this year — the most ever at the prison.

The incident, which took place Tuesday night in the jail's special holding unit, prompted B.C. Government Employees' Union spokesman Dean Purdy to call for tougher penalties for inmates who attack a corrections officer.

"We'd like to see the justice system stand up and take these assaults more seriously," Purdy said Wednesday.

Purdy said the guard was working alone when an inmate came up from behind and punched him several times in the back of the head. The guard was able to activate his personal alarm pager and summon help.

"A response team showed up to get control of the situation," he said, adding it can take about a minute for help to come.

"A lot can happen in a minute."

The guard escaped with abrasions to his face and forearms and injuries to his shoulder and elbow, said Purdy. He might have also suffered a concussion.

RCMP were dispatched at 5 p.m. Tuesday and are investigating. Sgt. Dave Prentice said an assault charge is being considered.

The matter is undergoing an internal investigation by the province's corrections branch. Spokesman Jess Gunnarson said there are 14 prisoners in the unit where the attack happened and only two were out of cells at the time.

"It was an extremely low staff-to-inmate ratio," said Gunnarson.

But Purdy said the unit is used to house inmates who have been in trouble within the jail before. In a case like this it would be best to have two guards on duty.

And, with assaults on guards on the rise, he believes there should be tougher penalties for inmates who attack a prison guard, he said.

"We're concerned the justice system isn't taking these (assaults) seriously enough," said Purdy.

Crown lawyer Stephen Lawhead said attacks on corrections officers are taken as seriously as those on other peace officers like police, wardens and sheriffs.

Charges range in severity from assault to assault with a weapon and disarming a peace officer. Lawhead said they are considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the evidence at hand.

He hasn't seen a lot these cases cross the Crown's desk, saying prisons have their own internal discipline process.

Purdy said 2011 is the first year the union has tracked assaults at KRCC. But he isn't aware of another year when there has been so many.