

## Alert guards prevent 'movie-like' escape from Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre

Saanich News  
Thu Jul 21 2011  
Byline: Kyle Slavin

An attempted prison escape reminiscent of the breakout in the film *The Shawshank Redemption* was foiled last weekend at the Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre.

Two prisoners were involved in the attempt, which was uncovered Sunday morning by corrections officials when they discovered a large hole in the ceiling of a cell inside the maximum security facility.

"The circumstances are dramatic and very movie-like," said Saanich police Sgt. Dean Jantzen, adding that more details won't be released unless charges against the two prisoners involved are sworn. "I can confirm that our detectives are investigating this incident. It involves the potential for a breach of security at the jail."

The hole was large enough for an individual to fit through, though Jantzen could not say whether any prisoner actually breached his cell.

"At no time was there any risk to public safety," Jantzen said.

The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General won't comment on what happened, but did confirm an incident took place.

"As soon as the hole was discovered, B.C. Corrections contacted Saanich police to start an investigation into the attempted escape," a ministry spokesman said.

"As this incident is now the subject of an active police investigation, we are unable to provide more information at this time."

Dean Purdy, chair of corrections and sheriff services with the B.C. Government Employees Union said no staff members were injured, but the attempt had "the potential to be very serious."

"I can say that overcrowding in the living unit where this occurred possibly played a part," Purdy said. The prison was built in 1985 to hold 206 inmates, but routinely houses 350 to 400, he said.

VIRCC, located on Wilkinson Road, is both a remand facility and a prison for inmates sentenced up to two years less a day in jail.

Neither Saanich police or the ministry would say whether the two inmates involved are in remand or serving a sentence.

"This is another example of how difficult the job of a correctional officer is," Purdy said. "We have to be ever-vigilant against escape attempts, homemade weapons, assaults on staff and the ongoing violence that occurs inside our correctional facilities." He said 15 to 20 guards would've been working at the time of the incident.

Kathy Corrigan, NDP critic for the ministry of public safety, says the ratio of guards to prisoners needs to be improved so corrections officers have better working conditions.

"When you have a situation like this where you have a potential breakout and you don't have adequate personnel, I think that the possibility of a crisis situation is made worse when this ratio is so poor," Corrigan said. "This time, apparently a potential breakout was prevented, but there are potential tragedies waiting in the wings if things aren't improved."

In addition to the police investigation, B.C. Corrections is conducting a critical incident review.