

B.C. prisons unsafe for guards, union says

Union representing B.C. prison guards wants stiffer penalties for assaults

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Eighteen staff members at the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre have been attacked this year. (CBC)

Following another attack on a guard in a Kamloops prison, the union representing corrections officers says B.C. prisons have become too dangerous.

B.C. Government and Service Employees Union spokesman Dean Purdy said B.C. prison guards have been victims of a record number of attacks this year.

This week, a guard suffered head injuries when a prisoner assaulted him at the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre.

"This was a surprise, unsuspected attack. He was punched several times in the head and suffered some pretty good injuries," Purdy said.

Purdy said the corrections officer, who may have suffered a concussion, was lucky to escape without serious injury.

B.C. Corrections spokesman Jess Gunnarson said the province is investigating the incident.

"Incidents of threats and violence against staff aren't tolerated. Inmates are always charged internally and police are contacted as well for investigation," Gunnarson said.

But Purdy said more needs to be done to protect guards and prosecute prisoners when assaults happen.

"You know it's very concerning for us. Safety is number one in a maximum security jail, because if you're not safe inside your workplace, you don't have anything," Purdy said.

He said the justice system needs to hand out stiffer penalties when assaults happen.

"We want the justice system to really start looking at these types of charges. We would like the courts to hand out the same types of dispositions or penalties [as those given] to people who assault police officers."

Purdy said overcrowding and an increased threat from gang members are factors in the number of attacks.

In November, an SFU criminologist released a report that concluded B.C. corrections officers are more likely to face on-the-job violence than any other protective service worker in the province, including police officers.