

## Corrections officers target of assaults at facility

Tue Jun 19 2012

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Vancouver Sun

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Assaults on two corrections officers at North Fraser Pretrial Centre - one resulting in hospitalization - are an indication of an "unacceptable" situation at the overcrowded jail, a union official says.

The assaults occurred Friday, when the prisoner count at the maximum-security facility was 545, said Dean Purdy, chair of corrections and sheriff services for the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union.

The jail was built for a maximum capacity of 300 when it opened in 2001. "It's about 170 per cent above capacity," Purdy said. "The officer-inmate ratio is about 60 to one."

He said this is the 16th assault at the centre so far this year. "We had 39 last year. From our point of view, that's unacceptable." Purdy said one of the assaults, at about 7 a.m., involved a prisoner who did not want to go to court "sucker-punching" a female officer in the side of the head.

The second incident occurred about four hours later when a prisoner with gang ties assaulted a male officer, who ended up in hospital.

"The inmate came up behind him and struck him on the side of the head, knocking him down," Purdy said. "He may have a broken orbital bone."

The prisoner involved in that assault has affiliations with the Independent Soldiers. Purdy said union officials met with Justice Minister Shirley Bond last year to discuss the growing violence at provincial jails and the need to reduce the officer-prisoner ratios.

"She agreed to take a look at it." Purdy said.

Purdy said union officials plan to meet next week with WorkSafeBC to discuss safety concerns and violence at B.C.'s six maximum-security jails.

Rotational lock-ups would allow half of the inmates out at a time, giving correctional officers a tool to better manage the prisoner population, Purdy said.