

Feces-throwing inmates present a threat to B.C. jail guards

Kim Bolan,
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Guards at B.C. jails say they are increasingly being targeted in a new kind of attack — where inmates are throwing feces and urine at them. Guards at B.C. jails say they are increasingly being targeted in a new kind of attack — where inmates are throwing feces and urine at them.

In the latest assault, a correctional officer at the North Fraser Pre-trial Centre was doused with excrement mixed with soup last Friday, says the union official representing prison staff.

Dean Purdy of the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union said the gruesome incident appears to have been a premeditated attack by someone who was put up to it by other gang-linked inmates.

"The mixture of feces and soup hit the correctional officer in the face, the head and the chest," Purdy said.

The institution went into a Code Yellow lockdown and the prisoner was put in isolation.

Coquitlam RCMP Cpl. Jamie Chung said investigators have recommended an assault charge be laid in the North Fraser case and are awaiting for Crown approval.

While the union has reported an overall increase in the number of assaults on staff, hurling bodily fluids at guards appears to be a new trend.

Over the last five months at the North Fraser jail, staff members have been hit five times with feces and urine. At the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre, similar attacks have occurred three times over seven months, Purdy said.

Earlier this month, a Kamloops judge sentenced KRCC prisoner Cory Mutchler to 12 months in jail for a feces assault. He was already in custody awaited trial in connection with a drug-related kidnapping last August.

Brent Merchant, assistant deputy minister in charge of B.C. Corrections, said the government is concerned about all attacks on staff and called the incidents involving feces "absolutely horrible."

And he said B.C. Corrections is doing everything it can to reduce violence inside B.C. jails.

"I think we do as well as we possibly can," Merchant said. "We are trying to minimize the chances of an incident."

Also last week, a female correctional officer was attacked at Surrey Pre-trial by a female inmate who cut the guard's face, scratched her and attempted to bite off her ear.

"She was taken to hospital and is now recovering at home," Purdy said.

Prison guards in provincial institutions have complained about extreme overcrowding for more than two years and Purdy said the situation has not eased much.

However, Merchant said that while B.C. jails continue to be overcrowded, the situation is not as dire as it was a year ago. The institutions are operating at about 149-per-cent capacity, he said.

When new facilities are completed in Surrey and in the Okanagan, the conditions will improve considerably, he said. The Surrey institution is slated for completion in late 2013.

In the meantime, any assaults that do occur are treated very seriously, Merchant said.

"We charge them internally and we call the police in," he said.

But Purdy said that when such cases go to trial, they don't get treated as seriously by the courts as cases where police officers are assaulted on the job.

"We are asking the judicial system to look at stiffer penalties for these kinds of assaults," Purdy said. "This is something that is a severely abnormal working condition."