

# Growing crowds seen in B.C. prisons

## Federal law could increase population of convicts

BY KIM BOLAN, VANCOUVER SUN

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New federal tough-on-crime legislation could increase the number of inmates in B.C. jails by more than 270 within two years, an analysis by the provincial government has warned.

That means even greater overcrowding in provincial institutions, the head of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union said Thursday.

There are 2,654 inmates in nine provincial jails on remand awaiting trial or serving sentences of less than two years.

The provincial government has already admitted that jails are at over-capacity and is expanding with a new Pretrial centre in Surrey and more beds added to other existing buildings.

"The province is in the midst of Phase 1 of its capital expansion, the largest in B.C. Corrections' history," government spokesman Marnie Mayhew said Thursday.

She added that any impact from the new federal "truth in sentencing" laws was, at this point, mere speculation.

Maynard said the B.C. government plans to ask Ottawa for funding to offset any added costs.

"This is a national issue with national implications. Every province is grappling with the potential impacts of this new federal legislation," Mayhew said. "Solutions and resources will need to be found through discussions at the federal/provincial/ territorial table."

The BCGEU received a letter from deputy solicitor-general David Morhart July 27 regarding ministry projections related to the legislation.

"The results of this analysis suggest that the average provincial daily prisoner count could rise by as much as 271 by the end of fiscal 2012/2013," Morhart's letter said.

BCGEU president Darryl Walker said the provincial government would have to build at least one more jail beyond the one already under construction.

"The number provided by the provincial government basically means building another prison in B.C.," Walker said. "When you consider the other federal legislation under consideration this number may be quite low. We also have the continuing problem with overcrowding."

Other federal legislation such as mandatory prison for drug-related crimes, changing conditional sentencing, and ending automatic statutory release after two-thirds of a sentence have been served will put additional pressure on provincial jails, Walker said.

Earlier this month, prisoners from the Red Scorpion gang managed to get away from their guard at Surrey Pre-trial centre and brawled with rivals from the United Nations gang. An internal investigation is underway.

Dean Purdy, who represents the union's correctional component, said overcrowding is leading to increased tension in jails, especially with so many gangsters in custody.

Many of the jails are at double capacity, Purdy added.

"Overcrowding leads to more staff assaults and problems for our staff and the system. Something is bound to give."

But Mayhew said the government was moving as quickly as it could. The new Surrey jail will open in 2013. Twenty new cells for women were recently opened in Prince George and, by next spring, there will be 104 new cells for women at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women.

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