

# Guard punched in head at Maple Ridge prison

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A guard at a Maple Ridge men's prison was punched several times by an inmate last week. The corrections officer was attacked in the common area of a general population cell unit at the Fraser Regional Correctional Centre during the dinner hour July 5.

Dean Purdy, a spokesperson for the B.C. Government Employees Union's correctional and sheriff services section, said the guard, who was supervising 32 men, was hit in the head several times.

The assault is the second attack on staff since May 16, when a supervisor was kicked in the head by an inmate.

"It goes to show how dangerous our jobs are," said Purdy.

"Violence levels in provincial jails are steadily increasing."

The prison guard union continues to blame overcrowding for contributing to many of the problems at Fraser regional, including a steady availability of illegal drugs, an increase in assault on corrections officers and "walkaways" from work crews.

Originally built to hold 254 inmates, the union notes Fraser regional is 200 per cent over capacity. On July 5, there were 513 inmates at the prison located on 256th Street.

It has 304 cells, including temporary structures built next the main building, and each cell can accommodate two inmates.

B.C. Corrections stressed that staff do everything they can to maintain a safe and secure living environment.

That said, given the criminal histories of those in custody, and the large number of people with addiction and mental health issues, occasional violent outbursts are a reality.

"The safety and security of provincial correctional officers is a top priority for B.C. Corrections and any incidence of violence against staff is taken very seriously," said a spokesperson.

Even as the inmate population has grown at Fraser regional, there has been no significant increase in the number of assaults on staff.

Mid-way through 2011, there have been three assaults on staff at Fraser Region, compared to total of 11 in 2009 and a total of 7 in 2010.