

## Guards protest B.C. prison conditions

By Tom Fletcher –  
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VICTORIA – B.C. needs 150 more provincial prison guards to protect against a rising number of assaults in crowded jails with many more mentally ill inmates, according to a report commissioned by their union.

The B.C. Government Employees Union hired Simon Fraser University criminologist Neil Boyd to survey conditions in B.C. jails, where "double-bunking" since 2002 has doubled the guard to inmate ratio to 40 to one.

At North Fraser Pretrial in Port Coquitlam, where prisoners await trial, the ratio is 60 inmates per guard. Boyd said so far this year there have been 29 reports of assaults on North Fraser guards, and there have also been sharp increases in assaults at other secure facilities around the province.

According to the survey of 200 guards at B.C. facilities this spring and summer, in the past year two thirds received a credible threat of harm from an inmate. Almost 40 per cent had been hit by feces, urine, vomit or spit, and more than one in four had been physically assaulted by an inmate.

Boyd said the majority of prison violence is between inmates. But with more gang-affiliated inmates in B.C. and about one in four having a mental disorder, guards are increasingly in danger themselves as they break up fights or respond to serious injuries, suicides and homicides.

Dean Purdy, a union official and supervisor at Vancouver Island Correctional Centre, said there have been 83 assaults on guards since the facility was double-bunked in 2003.

Boyd said the facilities need more staff to operate in a "direct supervision" model, where staff and inmates are exposed to each other in "living units" rather than inmates spending most time in locked cells. The survey found most corrections officers support the modern "living units" design in secure prisons, which include Kamloops, Prince George, Vancouver Island, Fraser Regional, Surrey Pretrial and Alouette Correctional Centre for Women.

Public Safety Minister Shirley Bond said her ministry is close to announcing a new site for a 360-cell facility in the Okanagan, which it has been trying to build for several years. The ministry has \$185 million in expansions planned, including another 200 corrections officers, she said.

Debating the issue with NDP public safety critic Kathy Corrigan Tuesday, Bond reminded her that a new jail was proposed for Corrigan's Burnaby constituency, but had to be moved to Surrey after the NDP led protests against it before the 2009 election.