

Guards say they need to watch too many prisoners

Byline: Dustin Walker
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The province should review the number of inmates that each correctional officer is responsible for supervising during outside work crews, says the union representing B.C. prison guards.

B.C. Corrections staff made several errors in their assessment of a dangerous inmate who escaped from a Nanaimo Correctional Centre work crew on Nov. 9 and was recaptured the next day, according to an internal review. The Nanaimo Daily News reported last week that the inmate has an extensive criminal record and was described as a violent offender by RCMP.

The review, obtained through a Freedom of Information request, also noted that corrections staff failed to count the inmates on "several occasions throughout the day" and didn't enter required information about the prisoner's offence history into the case-management system.

Dean Purdy, chairman of correctional and sheriff services for the B.C. Government Employees' Union, agrees more training may be needed. However, he added that corrections staff face a heavy workload, which may have contributed to the November escape. "The number of inmates assigned to one correctional officer working outside the envelope of the centre may be an issue in this case," he said.

Purdy thinks the province should look at reviewing whether the ratio of inmates-to-corrections staff is adequate for the work crews at the local jail.

B.C. Corrections said it's not planning any reviews on the ratios. A spokesperson for the agency pointed out that the internal review into the November escape from NCC did not suggest that the inmate-to-staff ratio contributed to the incident.

B.C. Corrections wouldn't say how many inmates are placed on work crews at NCC, citing security concerns.