

## **Inmate attacks prison guards; 'History of violence, mental-health issues'**

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Two prison guards were injured Sunday, one ending up in hospital, after being attacked by an inmate at Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre. B.C. Corrections confirmed the incident occurred between an inmate and two guards in the segregation area Sunday morning.

One guard was punched in the face and sent to Royal Inland Hospital for assessment of a possible concussion and released and a second guard mildly straining her thumb.

The inmate "has a history of violence and mental-health issues," read a statement from B.C. Corrections.

According to the statement, the inmate may face charges or internal disciplinary measures, which can range from reprimands to confinement in a segregation cell for up to 60 days and loss of earned remission for time served.

It's the eighth or ninth inmate attack on a guard at KRCC this year, according to Dean Purdy, chair of BCGEU's corrections and sheriffs services component.

"From what I've heard, he's got some pretty soreness on the head. Some bruising. Some contusions," said Purdy. "He's recuperating right now."

Purdy is repeating his insistence that something must be done to address overcrowding.

This year's violence against correctional officers at KRCC is on par with last year's, which ended with 17 guards attacked by inmates.

According to the B.C. Corrections statement, such violence is bound to occur.

"Given the criminal histories of those in custody, and the large number of people with addiction and mental-health issues, it is impossible to eliminate all risk," it reads.

But the union blames the violence partially on overcrowding.

"It's not directly attributable to the overcrowding but it certainly has an impact on the temperature or the mood inside the jail," he said.

The jail was built for 168 inmates. It routinely houses double that number, said Purdy.

"You have a living unit with one officer working alone with up to 40 inmates," he said.

"Prior to 2002, that number used to be capped at one to 20 and anytime the living unit count went above 20 another officer was brought in.

"Now, those numbers are as high as one to 40 in Kamloops and as high as one to 60 at North Fraser pretrial centre in Port Coquitlam."

And the federal Conservative government's omnibus crime bill is only expected to worsen the situation, he said.

A meeting with Minister of Justice Shirley Bond last year convinced the union the province is receptive and concerned over the grievances, said Purdy.

A new jail being built north of Oliver and an expansion of a pretrial centre in Surrey will help, but that's three or four years away. The BCGEU is hoping to see its suggestion implemented quickly to alleviate the pressure.

"We'd like to see them look at rotational lock-ups where you alternate unlocking the inmates half at a time," said Purdy.

The system is used for "mentally disordered offenders" and enhanced supervision units.

Short of hiring more correctional officers, the union wants to see the system expanded to the rest of the jail.

"(That would) better manage the population and make it less onerous on the correctional officers who are bearing the brunt of a lot of violence," said Purdy.

A meeting with Worksafe B.C. on June 26 may also lead to some orders for better conditions for the guards.

"They have the ability to write orders," said Purdy.

"Their regulations say the employer has the responsibility to provide a safe working environment.

"But until we see the officer to inmate ratios dealt with . . . we think the violence is going to continue to rise."

KRCC officials did not answer request for comment regarding union grievances on overcrowding.