

## Maple Ridge prison guards want stiffer penalties for assaults

Maple Ridge News

Tue Nov 29 2011

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Guards at a Maple Ridge men's prison want management to take assaults and threats more seriously following two attacks where feces was thrown on staff.

The call for stiffer penalties against inmates follows a series of incidents at the Fraser Regional Correctional Centre this year. In July, a guard there was punched in the head. Then on Sept. 25, excrement was flung at a corrections officer.

The union representing prison guards claims there was a second incident involving feces in October, but that was not confirmed by the province.

A guard, speaking on condition of anonymity, said both incidents were disgusting and demeaning, and not dealt with properly.

"Management isn't doing anything about it," he added.

The guards' complaints follow a report released last week by the B.C. Government Employees Union, which hired Simon Fraser University criminologist Neil Boyd to survey conditions in B.C. jails.

According to the report, more than 90 per cent of correctional officers have been exposed to blood and more than 75 per cent to feces, spit and urine in the past year.

Of the 200 officers surveyed for the study, two-thirds have also received a credible threat from an inmate in the past year.

Dean Purdy, with the BCGEU, said staff at Fraser Regional are not happy with the response from management.

He too confirmed there had been at least two incidents involving feces since September.

"We would like to see a harsher penalty dealt out through the courts," said Purdy, who blames overcrowding for escalating tension within provincial jails.

Originally built to hold 254 inmates, the union notes Fraser Regional is almost 200 per cent over capacity. On Monday, there were 488 inmates at the prison located on 256th Street.

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

But B.C. Corrections points out that statistics for 2011 show no significant increase in assaults against correctional officers compared to previous years.

"Incidents of threats and violence, whether between inmates or against staff, are not tolerated and inmates face immediate consequences when they occur," said spokesperson Jess Gunnarson.

Inmates who are violent can be charged internally and placed in segregation for 30 days. Police are also

contacted and can recommend criminal charges, if warranted.

The B.C. government is going to spend \$185-million to add 340 cells to its capacity - the largest capital investment in B.C. Corrections' history.

In addition, a decision is expected soon on a site for a 360-cell correctional facility in the Okanagan.