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# Staff shortage could get guard killed: union

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A prison guard was seriously injured in an assault Wednesday at the North Fraser Pre-Trial Corrections Centre and a union representative is calling on the provincial government to take a look at staffing levels there before a guard is killed.

This is the 29th assault on a guard in the past two years at that Port Coquitlam facility, which was built in 2000 to house 300 inmates but on average has 650 prisoners, said Dean Purdy, the chairman of the corrections and services component of the British Columbia Government Employees Union.

"We don't want to be in a position where it takes the death of an officer before a change is made," said Purdy.

He said the most recent assault happened Wednesday around 4:45 p.m. when the guard, who has about 10 years experience, was working alone in a unit with upwards of 60 inmates.

He said the man was punched by one of the inmates several times, then fell to the ground where he was kicked and stomped. The guard suffered cuts and bruises to his face and has a concussion.

Purdy said all he would have had on him at the time was a personal alarm pager before help arrived a few minutes after the assault began.

"This has reached a point where our staff are saying they are not going to take it anymore. They want the proper tools. We want government to increase staffing levels and we think they (guards) should be equipped with pepper spray and batons when working alone or first responders (to a crisis)," said Purdy.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, which is responsible for the correctional centres, was not available.