

Excrement-throwing attacks on jail guards up

By Jeff Nagel
Surrey North Delta Leader
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Guards in B.C. prisons are reporting an upswing in ugly attacks in which prisoners hurl feces or urine at them.

A prisoner at North Fraser Pretrial Centre in Port Coquitlam splashed a correctional officer there with a mixture of excrement and soup in the latest incident, which a union representative says appears to have been orchestrated by gangsters.

"It hit him in the head, face and chest," said Dean Purdy, spokesman for the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union.

A lockdown resulted from the Jan. 27 attack and police have recommended an assault charge be laid.

On the same day, a female correctional officer at Surrey Pretrial Services Centre was savagely attacked by a female prisoner inside a living unit.

"She was cut and scratched in the face and the inmate attempted to bite her ear off," Purdy said, adding the guard was treated in hospital and is recovering at home.

He said there's been a growing trend of prisoners resorting to the use of their bodily fluids as biological weapons.

There have been five such assaults at North Fraser Pretrial in the last five months, he said, and three at Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre in the past six months.

He was not aware of any at Surrey or Fraser Regional Correctional Centre in Maple Ridge.

A survey last year of 200 guards found nearly 40 per cent had been hit by feces, urine, vomit or spit.

"This is a trend that seems to be increasing," Purdy said, adding the union wants stiffer sentences for such assaults, in line with penalties for assaulting a police officer on the job.

"Our members fear is that if something's not done to curb these types of assaults, that this is going to escalate into a common tactic inside our jails."

Guards splashed with fecal matter or other bodily fluids are traumatized and often have to take medicine to ward off possible disease exposure, Purdy added.

"It's an assault that has psychological and physical impact."

The growing influence of gangsters in prison seems to be a factor, he said.

"Inmates are getting pressured by other inmates to do these kinds of assaults."

Purdy said some past excrement-throwing attacks have netted only an extra month in jail or time served – sentences he called "way off base."

But he applauded the one-year jail term handed out in early January for a similar assault by an inmate on a guard in Kamloops last November.

Cory Stewart Mutchler pleaded guilty to assault after hurling a water bottle filled with a mixture of excrement and urine that coated a guard with whom he'd had a dispute.

Judge Herman Rohrmoser called it a "disturbing, disgusting and dangerous" tactic that goes "far beyond anything that can be considered normal or justifiable."

Conditions at jails across B.C. are severely crowded and that's thought to be one factor contributing to prison violence.

A major expansion of Surrey Pretrial is slated for completion late in 2013 and the province is also expected to build a new jail in the Okanagan.

The union argues more prison guards are needed in addition to more space.

A study last year found the inmate-to-guard ratio in B.C. jails has doubled since 2002 to 40 inmates for every guard through the use of double bunking and runs as high as 60 to 1 at North Fraser Pretrial.

The study suggested prison violence may be rising because one in four inmates have a mental disorder and a growing number of gang-linked prisoners have added to tensions.