

Investigation under way into two KRCC security breaches

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Kamloops Daily News
Feb 3, 2012

A security review revealed that Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre must beef up its practices prior to two recent break-ins at the jail, a provincial spokesman said Thursday.

"We've identified some areas where we can further bolster our security and Kamloops is definitely a part of that," said corrections spokesman Jess Gunnarson.

"We will continue that process based on the results of this review."

Gunnarson would not specify what work needs to be done to improve perimeter security at the jail. He said the review was conducted at all provincial jails prior to the security breaches, which took place on Dec. 13 and Jan. 26.

"For security reasons I don't want to get into the specifics, but I can assure you Kamloops is among the centres we'll be doing that work on," he said.

Nor would Gunnarson go into detail about the breaches. But B.C. Government Employees' Union spokesman Dean Purdy said in each case someone scaled the jail's two-metre high perimeter fence and drilled a hole in a cell window in the jail's segregation unit.

Early reports suggested a laser was used to drill into one of the pieces of Lexan glass. The Daily News has learned a blowtorch was used.

Purdy believes the breaches were made to smuggle contraband — possibly drugs — into KRCC. He said inmates will go to whatever means necessary to obtain what they want.

"That's one of the things the public doesn't realize, that we're forever vigilant to contraband like drugs and weapons getting into the prison," he said.

The incident does raise alarm bells for the union, which is conducting its own investigation along with the province's corrections branch and RCMP. Purdy said a security breach like this puts the lives of inmates, guards and even the public at risk.

No suspects have been identified. Purdy said the jail's surveillance footage is being reviewed as part of the investigation.

Gunnarson said guards screen all visitors for contraband and perform random cell searches for the same.

RCMP Const. Bernie Ward said he isn't able to discuss specifics about the case, as an investigation is ongoing.

These incidents are just the latest in a growing list of cases that put the spotlight on tensions at the jail.

Guards have had containers of feces tossed at them and an inmate was blinded in one eye when bits of a pencil were lodged in his brain during an altercation with another prisoner.

Late last year, Stephen Michael Hodgins, 22, spent 11 days on the run after fleeing a KRCC work crew on Oct. 18. He was arrested without incident at Northhills Mall after being spotted by a customer.