

Corrections Briefings

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DOC "Gauges" its Performance

In pursuit of the department's mission, the Oregon Department of Corrections uses prison time to prepare inmates to become law-abiding citizens. As do other prison systems nationwide, the department has always used its recidivism rate (30 percent) as one gauge of its success.

Behind a good recidivism rate lay a number of prison practices and correctional programs that have an effect on inmates' criminality following release. In order to support and promote those programs and practices that work well, the department has increased its focus on measuring performance through research and analysis.

The department has charted its progress, the results of which are available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.doc.state.or.us/research/GraphMeter.html>.

The Web site identifies seven elements, and corresponding expectations within each element, that recognize the department's current status. Using graphics, the Web site shows at a glance whether the department is at, below, or ahead of target for each area.

The seven elements and the department's expectations are:

Safe and Secure Institutions

Expectation: Inmates must live in a fair, safe, and drug free environment in order to practice the skills and attitudes necessary to make their return to the community successful.

Effective Programs

Expectation: At least 95 percent of the inmates will ultimately return to their communities after an average prison sentence of 37 months. Programs must have empirical support in the research literature and must produce effects that transcend short-term adaptation by inmates to the prison environment. In other words, the program must have an effect on inmate-participants' success after prison.

Safe and Healthy Workplace

Expectation: DOC employees are our largest investment and our greatest asset in changing inmate attitudes and behavior. To be effective, employees must feel safe, be free of work-related health problems, and work in an environment that supports a high level of achievement.

Community Corrections

Expectation: DOC can only attain its primary outcome of reducing the likelihood of future criminal conduct if community-based programs and offender transition are successful.

OREGON DEPARTMENT
OF CORRECTIONS

DAVID S. COOK
DIRECTOR

The mission of the Oregon Department of Corrections is to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior.

JOHN A. KITZHABER, M.D.
GOVERNOR



Planning and Support

Expectation: DOC will hold operating costs to the absolute minimum by bringing prison beds on line only when necessary, by increasing administrative efficiencies, and by providing adequate information for decision making.

Business

Expectation: Inmate work crews and Oregon Correctional Enterprises will be self-supporting and they will focus on activities that allow inmates to practice the skills which will lead to post release employment.

Internal Communication

Expectation: To be successful as a department, each DOC employee must have a thorough understanding of how their individual activities relate to the department's primary public safety mission.

"As a matter of accountability to the citizens, the department does not measure the quality of its programs subjectively, or on a 'feel-good' scale," said Director Dave Cook. "To be provided to Oregon inmates, programs and practices must be proven, scientifically, to work. They must make prison operations safer and more efficient, and they must help improve success rates of released offenders."

New GED Challenge Tackled by DOC

Of DOC's 11,000 inmates, 76.5 percent did not complete traditional high school. Of those, 30.6 percent did earn a GED prior to arriving in prison, but 46 percent had no education credentials whatsoever.

Lack of a high school education is a known risk factor for repeat criminal behavior. Therefore, any inmate who does not have a diploma or GED will find they have an education program requirement on their Inmate Incarceration Plan. Furthermore, those with minimal literacy skills have Mandatory Literacy to accomplish as their first program requirement, followed by the GED.

The GED, or General Educational Development test, enables people to obtain the equivalent of a high school diploma through courses and testing. It has been around since WWII, when it was created to help soldiers move from the military to civilian life. The GED has changed with the times; it's been revamped over the years to more closely match modern high school curricula and higher skill demands of the workplace and contemporary society.

On January 1, 2002, the GED as we knew it disappeared. In probably its most sweeping change, the first since 1988, the new GED requires a high degree of analytical thinking on the part of students. For instance, instead of only multiple choice questions, students must now fill in the correct answer on some items. According to the *Washington Post*, "The social studies portion of the test requires understanding excerpts from 'key documents,' such as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court decisions. And in addition to ferreting out themes presented in snippets of literature, poetry and plays, students are expected to analyze everyday documents found at home or in the workplace..." (Monday, January 7, 2002)

Save this Date

The dedication ceremony and open house for Coffee Creek Correctional Facility near Wilsonville is set for Saturday, April 6, 2002. The dedication ceremony will be at 1 p.m. with guided tours available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit the new women's prison and intake center before it's locked down.



Additionally, those students who passed some but not all of the GED's five sections cannot carry the portions they passed to the new year. This is a dramatic departure from past practices that allowed students to keep completed test scores indefinitely.

As a result of these changes, the department's education staff made a tremendous effort to encourage inmates to complete and pass all five sections. They streamlined services by placing inmates who already had high reading and math scores into a fast track program. They were able to move some resources around to bring in some additional part-time instructors to address this GED challenge.

"It really did pay off," said Shannon DeLateur, DOC's administrator in charge of inmate education. "Now that we're off to a running start we hope to use some of these strategies to continue encouraging inmates to complete their high school educations."

Ms. DeLateur and her staff measure GED success in six-month increments. From July 1, 2000 to December 31, 2000, 368 inmates passed their GEDs. During the same time period in 2001, 563 inmates passed. "That is a 52 percent increase!" Ms. DeLateur said.

Educators are unsure how much more difficult the new GED will prove to be. Nationwide instructors are just beginning to learn what's involved in the new tests. "DOC will evaluate and adopt the best strategies and methodologies to tackle the new tests," Ms. DeLateur explained. "We're excited about the new curricula in each section and though it may be more challenging for the students, they will be better prepared as a result of the changes."

After a Critical Incident...

On December 24, Inmate Leighton Bates escaped from Oregon State Correctional Institution in Salem. He was captured in Salem on December 26. He has been charged with not only the escape, but with crimes committed while on escape status.

In the days following a "critical incident" such as an escape, homicide, or disturbance, what does the department do to learn from the experience and prevent similar circumstances from happening again?

Contain, control, investigate

Whenever a serious event occurs that has security implications, the Department of Corrections acts swiftly on a number of fronts. First, of course, is to contain and control the incident. The affected prison moves quickly to plug any obvious holes, literally and figuratively. For instance, if a fence has been cut, it is immediately repaired.

Concurrently or immediately following the incident, the prison staff will start to put together the pieces leading up to the event. An internal investigation is often initiated by the prison and a criminal investigation by the State Police, who work together closely to share information and leads.

The prison is certainly interested in the motives, co-conspirators, and methods used, but its first order of business is to prevent a similar incident from occurring. Always of concern are copycats or undetected security breaches. Until the department is satisfied that there will be no repeat occurrences, prison operations may be restricted, up to and including a lock down.



The review process

Once the critical incident is ended or controlled, the review process begins. Rather than duplicate the focus of an investigation, reviews look more at prison operational issues that may have contributed to, or been compromised by, a critical incident.

Most reviews begin with prison staff and managers taking a close look at all of the physical factors involved in that particular incident. This gives management an immediate sense of how an incident happened and what can quickly be fixed. Longer-term issues are often identified and flagged for resolution in the next budget cycle.

Following an incident, the department's security executives have the option of putting together a review team to examine broader security practices that may have contributed to an incident. Review team members are usually security professionals from other DOC prisons such as security managers or assistant superintendents of security. From time to time, depending upon the circumstances, other professionals might be involved as well; fugitive specialists or program managers, for instance, can add valuable insight.

The review team starts by looking at the prison's initial findings. They interview the prison's management to help focus the review. Then relevant prison operations are put under a microscope, particularly issues involving people, places, and processes. The team outlines any recommendations they may have.

People issues include an evaluation of staffing levels, whether staff were doing their assigned jobs during the time leading up to the incident (the duties of most jobs in a prison are detailed in "post orders"), whether the post orders adequately describe the duties, and whether

inmates had access to people or places that compromised security. The team evaluates written documentation, makes personal observations, and interviews staff to learn from their experiences.

Direct observation is a valuable tool to assess whether the prison's physical layout and access points contributed to the critical incident. For instance, after one recent escape, staff discovered that construction workers had left some grassy ditches outside the fence that were deep enough to conceal a person, should one make it through the fence. Legitimate access points are scrutinized as well.

Smooth prison operations hinge on appropriate policies and procedures that are well known and understood. When a process fails, a door opens for inmates to exploit. Very often, these kinds of failures are due to human error, whether it be faulty assumptions, miscommunication, or complacency. Review teams excel at identifying processes that need to be revisited.

Following the review, the team writes a report detailing their findings. Reports often provide a summary of the event and then, point by point, list the operational issues that contributed to the incident and the team's recommendations to alleviate the problems.

Independent review

If a critical incident is of such magnitude that an outside perspective would help tighten security, the department looks to the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) for additional expert advice. NIC helps on two fronts: it provides technical assistance grants to fund a team of experts to conduct an independent review, and it puts together the team from a list of corrections authorities from across the nation. In fact, many members of the Oregon Department of Corrections have served on teams that assist other states.



Security audits

Every other year, each prison's security practices are audited by a team of department authorities. In the alternate years, audit follow-ups take place to ensure that security recommendations have been put into place. Audit procedures are written to thoroughly scrutinize every prison function. Security audits take a number of days, but the information generated helps the department run extremely tight operations.

Critical incidents in Oregon's prisons are very rare, not due to luck or coincidence, but to multi-tiered security practices and professional staff. Critical incident reviews exemplify the department's high standard of accountability. The payoff is remarkably safe correctional institutions for the public, staff and inmates alike.

Briefs

- On January 1, 10,949 inmates were incarcerated in Oregon's 14 state prisons and 481 DOC inmates were in the custody of other agencies such as the Oregon Youth Authority.
 - During 2001, DOC performed nearly 22,000 drug tests on inmates. Overall, 173 samples tested positive for one or more substances. Oregon DOC's annual rate is .69 percent, the seventh year in a row that DOC's rate has been less than one percent.
- The DOC and Oregon Corrections Enterprises contribute printing services from the OSCI Print Shop in support of the Hunger Relief Task Force. To help end hunger, the print shop recently produced a consumer guide to using the Food Stamp Program.

Fast Fact:

Want more information?
Check out the
DOC's Web site:
<http://www.doc.state.or.us>

- As a gesture of good will, inmates at Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City remove snow from the driveways of senior and disabled citizens. The citizens respond by holding a recognition ceremony annually to thank the inmates for their hard work. • State of Oregon employees contributed more than 15,000 toys to the Governor's Toy Drive, hundreds of which were given by DOC staff.
- DOC inmate work crews not only pick up litter from Oregon's road sides, they sort the contents of those yellow trash bags for recycling to reduce the use of landfills.
- Gary Field, administrator of DOC's Counseling and Treatment Services, is serving as an advisor and editor for a Council of State Governments' project to identify issues and solutions surrounding the increasing numbers of people with mental illnesses entering the criminal justice system. Beyond a core document that identifies practical solutions, the Council of State Governments' project is likely to yield a series of briefing papers for state legislators.
- Many Oregon prisons will grow their own organic produce this summer in an effort to cut costs and employ inmates.
- Oregon DOC's e-mail information service doc.info@state.or.us responded to 150 requests for information in January 2002.
- Oregon.Gov <<http://www.oregon.gov>> is the the state's new Web portal.

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