



EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2009-2010

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE JAIL

Case No. GJ 09-025

REASON FOR REPORT

The California Penal Code §919(a) and §919(b) charges the Grand Jury to annually inspect correctional institutions that operate within the County.

BACKGROUND

The South Lake Tahoe Jail was constructed in 1973 and was partially renovated in 1991. The facility has a rated capacity of 158 inmates. It is classified as a Type II facility, meaning it is an adult medium security jail. Inmates typically spend more than 24 hours but less than one year in the facility.

The Lieutenant is the only sworn officer at the jail.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the Grand Jury inspected the South Lake Tahoe Jail on October 19, 2009.

Interviews included:

- Kitchen supervisor
- Officer in charge of the facility
- Officer in charge of the Control Room

Documents reviewed:

- El Dorado County Grand Jury Report of 2008-2009
- Environmental Health Evaluation Report for the inspection dated 12/19/09
- Fire and Life Safety Report dated 2/11/09
- Health Nutritional Report dated 9/12/08

- Inspection reports performed between July 1, 2008 and November 6, 2009 including the State Corrections Standards Authority Report of October 22, 2009 (inspection dated May 13-14, 2009)
- Medical/Mental Health Evaluation Report performed 10/16/08

FINDINGS

The Lieutenant in charge utilizes progressive administrative and management techniques and involvement of staff in the development of the proposed budget. This officer also provides instruction in ethics for Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST). Failure to report ethics violations by staff is considered a major offense. Inmates are allowed direct access to the Lieutenant twice weekly which has significantly diminished inmate complaints.

As of May 2009, staffing for the jail consisted of seven management/supervisory positions, 30 custodial positions and 13 support positions for a total of 50 positions. As of October 2009 staffing had been reduced to 32 positions. A female officer must be on duty at all times. As Custodial Officer positions become vacant the hope is to fill them with female officers, up to a total of eight positions.

The Lieutenant is responsible for five separate budgets totaling approximately \$7,000,000.

In addition to its continuing responsibilities, the South Lake Tahoe Jail quickly accommodated Mono County's request for temporary housing of inmates during the recent flooding of their facility. The jail also contracts with Alpine County for housing inmates.

The grievance procedure allows for four levels of review. If an intermediate solution is not reached within 20 days, a final review is scheduled with a Captain.

A major and important task is the proper classification and screening of inmates which must be resolved in order to protect their health and safety. Inmates are typically provided with one hour outside their cells for exercise each 24 hour period.

A number of programs administered through the jail are designed to enhance inmate skills as contributing members of society. Though reduced in number and type from prior years, these include:

- Church Services
- Culinary Arts (a major and very successful program)
- Day Reporting
- Drug and Alcohol Counseling
- English as a Second Language
- GED Program (position open as of inspection)

- Health Education and Recovery Through Self-Responsibility (H.E.A.R.T.S.)
- Mental Health Court – An inmate with mental health problems is directed to Mental Health Court for screening of their case. After review, the inmate is either directed to mental health programs or to continuation of their sentencing. .
- Women’s Health

Entries by participants in the Culinary Arts program have won many awards in recent years, and a top prize at the County Fair. The program has been certified by the Lake Tahoe Community College as a “Certificate of Culinary Arts” program. Participants have nearly a zero rate of recidivism.

In accordance with the California Penal Code §933 and 933.05 each numbered finding and recommendation will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed.

The 2009-2010 Grand Jury made the following findings:

1. The present system of the security and surveillance cameras does not adequately cover all areas of the jail.
2. The recorder cameras are obsolete and parts are no longer available. The Sheriff has approved a request for improvement and expansion of the number of recorders. This request is pending the approval of the Board of Supervisors.
3. The entire facility is constructed with a flat roof design which may have contributed to frequent leaks and repairs.
4. The interior cinder block wall on the east side of the jail that separated B and C pods has a history of cracks. A County facility inspection was done in July 2009 and a completed analysis is set for December. As of December 21, 2009 the contractor had been selected and a contract is being prepared.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An analysis of the surveillance camera system should be evaluated with implementation of recommendations.
2. The request by the Sheriff for additional recorders should be approved by the Board of Supervisors.
3. A structural engineer should determine the cause(s) of leakage in the facility and recommend the appropriate correction and repair.
4. The contract for repairs to the cinder block wall has been approved. The Grand Jury needs to be notified upon completion.

RESPONSE

Responses to findings and recommendations in this report are required in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05. Address responses to: The Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury, Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court, 1354 Johnson Blvd, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150.

COMMENDATION

The 2009-2010 El Dorado County Grand Jury commends the South Lake Tahoe Jail administration and staff for their dedication in providing a safe and secure custodial environment. The number and variety of available programs, especially the Culinary Arts program, have a proven record of success.