

JAIL BULLETIN

Number 62

March, 1990

DEFINING SUPERVISION

When we discuss prisoner supervision, we must address two major functional areas, which together achieve the goals of supervision:

Identifying - Observing prisoners in housing areas and in other areas of the facility, monitoring activities and behavior, and detecting presence, absence and problems; and

Reacting - Addressing identified problems, responding to calls for assistance, preventing problems, and intervening as needed.

These two functional groupings of activities can be used to classify all of the actions and approaches which comprise the supervisory function.

These two groups of activities can combine to achieve the overall goals of the facility: to control the prisoner population, ensure the safety of all persons in the facility, and protect the public.

This text focuses on the first group of activities, the identifying functions, by:

- o defining some of the objectives of supervision which are associated with the identifying category;
- o suggesting how the objectives apply to various areas in the facility;
- o identifying the range of methods which are appropriate;
- o offering guidelines for the use of the methods to provide supervision in secure facilities; and
- o challenging detention managers to evaluate their current operations and facilities to determine how well objectives are met in each area of the facility.

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Objectives Associated with the "Identifying" Functions

The first step in the process of examining the adequacy of current supervisory efforts is to establish objectives which are to be achieved for each functional area. The following list addresses the "identifying" category of activities.

Detect self-destructive or assaultive behavior. It is necessary to observe prisoners to identify behaviors that pose a threat to themselves and to others. Often close observation combined with proper staff training will allow staff to predict incidents before they happen. Observation is necessary when prisoners are alone, or in small or large groups.

Detect unauthorized absence. Prisoners must be in their assigned areas at proper times. Identifying absences as soon as possible increases the likelihood that a critical incident (escape, assault, suicide) will be avoided or minimized.

Detect unauthorized presence. Prisoners are not allowed in certain areas at any time, and access to other areas is usually strictly scheduled. Knowing when prisoners are "out of place" is essential to prevent problems. Also, intruders must be detected as soon as possible to minimize penetration into the security perimeter.

Detect disruptive or dangerous behavior. This is a very broad objective, which has varied application throughout the secure facility. The implications of this objective range from seemingly innocent "clowning around" of prisoners which may cause injury, to deliberate attempts to create problems and breach security. Examples would include fights between prisoners, assaults on staff, attempts to break custody or to breach security, and other actions by prisoners that directly or indirectly jeopardize the safety and security of the facility and its occupants.

Determine physical and emotional condition of prisoner. Ensuring the presence of a prisoner in his/her cell is not enough; the "health and welfare" of the prisoner must be periodically determined as a key component of safety and security efforts. Through these checks, the mood of a despondent prisoner may be assessed before he/she attempts suicide, or the prisoner who is unconscious is discovered as soon as possible so that treatment may be provided.

Detect call for assistance. Staff must be able to hear and/or see prisoners and other staff who are calling for assistance. This may range from a prisoner in a holding cell who is requesting access to a toilet, to an officer who is in trouble in a prisoner-occupied area. If some means for detecting these calls for assistance is not in place, the safety of all occupants is threatened.

Provide secondary assistance for staff. Staff members in a secure facility are almost always outnumbered by prisoners. When a staff member enters a holding cell with two occupants, or a dayroom with ten prisoners, his/her safety is always on the line. The same is true for one-on-one situations, in which a prisoner may overcome an officer under the wrong conditions. Often staff members are not able to call for assistance, and audio monitoring proves inadequate. Some form of "backup" is needed to monitor the activities of staff as they work in the facility, and to identify problems as soon as they occur.

Provide “presence” to deter or reassure. Similar to the “backup” function provided in the preceding objective, this function is conducted in an obvious manner so that prisoners are clearly aware that their actions are being monitored. This may deter attempts to overpower staff, because prisoners know that additional staff will be sent to intervene immediately. This function is also important to prisoners in special areas of the facility, such as those under close observation. The knowledge of constant and close observation may serve to reassure prisoners who otherwise feel isolated and alone, and may also deter self-destructive behavior.

Identify persons seeking access or entry. As persons approach the security perimeter, or seek access to different areas within the facility, it is necessary to identify them to determine if entry or access is to be permitted.

Control access, entry and movement. Identification of staff, prisoners and visitors is necessary to determine if access to an area, or movement from one area to another, is to be permitted. Observation of persons within the facility is essential for proper implementation of this function.

Detect escape attempts. It is necessary to identify prisoner movements within the facility which may be associated with an escape attempt. Movements near or adjacent to the security perimeter are particularly sensitive.

Identify the passage of contraband. Whenever prisoners come into contact with visitors, contraband may be introduced into the facility. In addition to searches, close observation of interactions is necessary as another preventive measure.

Record prisoner behavior. In certain areas of the facility (observation, detoxification, medical area, segregation), it is often necessary to monitor prisoner behavior and to make written notations.

Methods for Satisfying the “Identifying” Supervision Objectives

A variety of methods can be employed to achieve the objectives outlined in the preceding pages. What is unique about the methods associated with the “identifying” functions is that many of them do not require contact with prisoners, and many may be implemented from central staff stations or posts.

The “reacting” functions almost always require a method in which a staff member moves to a specific location and interacts with another person.

The methods have been divided into three categories that reflect whether staff are stationary or mobile, whether direct contact with prisoners is possible, and whether observation is direct or remote:

Direct Contact with Prisoners

1. Moving in prisoner-occupied areas (e.g. dayrooms, activity areas, entering a holding cell).

Secondary Contact with Prisoners

2. Moving in prisoner-occupied areas with security barriers between staff and prisoner (e.g. observing prisoners in their cells through bars or windows, observing dayrooms from the catwalk, observing occupants of a holding cell from outside of the cell).
3. Observing prisoners and areas from a part-time station (e.g. an officer station that is used to write reports but which is not always occupied).
4. Observing prisoners and areas from a full-time station (e.g. a dispatch center or a control center which is constantly staffed).

Remote Observation

5. Audio and visual observation of prisoners and areas (as with closed-circuit television - CCTV).
6. Audio monitoring of activities and areas.

Matching Method with Areas of the Facility

The most sensitive aspect of creating a well-supervised facility is to select the right methods for each situation. Some methods are clearly inappropriate for certain areas and will not achieve the objectives that have been established.

For instance, providing only audio monitoring of a sallyport into the facility will not allow proper identification of persons who are seeking entry into the security perimeter.

Using CCTV as the only means of supervising prisoners in their cell areas will never adequately determine their physical and emotional condition, and often is not even effective at determining if they are present.

Conversely, relying only on moving staff to supervise the facility will not ensure continuous monitoring of key areas.

Some Guidelines

The following guidelines may begin to suggest ways to improve supervision within each facility.

Do not depend too much on CCTV. Many studies have shown that closed-circuit television (CCTV) is an important tool for supervision, but that it is often improperly used. CCTV applications must be carefully considered, both in terms of the effectiveness of the use, and the potential privacy issues which may arise (the monitoring of toilet and shower areas raises serious constitutional issues). When CCTV is used too often, the staff person charged with watching the monitors cannot effectively keep track of what is happening. Many facilities place monitors in law enforcement dispatch centers, where dispatchers are easily distracted with other duties, and often work with their backs to the monitors. Many prisoners have escaped within plain view of CCTV cameras which were supposedly being monitored.

Maximize the use of direct observation from full-time posts. If you have a control center or dispatch center in your facility, try to locate key activities (such as booking and observation cells) within direct view of the staff member who operates the post. Try to provide sight lines down key corridors and into public lobbies and sallyports. Peripheral vision allows staff members to effectively monitor activities that occur within direct view, and clearly shows prisoners and visitors that their actions are being watched.

Improve sight lines throughout the facility. Consider the blind spots that can cause danger to staff and visitors. Remove walls as necessary, and “perforate” walls to provide views into spaces, using glass or bars. How may short-term holding cells have been built which offer little or no direct view by staff into the cell without opening the door? Replace solid doors with ones that have vision panels.

Relocate activities to improve supervision. Be creative in considering where activities should occur. If you have a problem supervising booking, consider changing the location of the booking area. If observation or detoxification cells are isolated, consider moving them to a safer place.

Do not hesitate to consider changing your physical plant. Often we tend to think that the spaces in our facility are inflexible. When it comes to safety and supervision, it is often necessary to “fine-tune” the facility to provide a safe setting in which supervision may be achieved. Weigh the costs of changes against the continued risks that will be encountered if the changes are not made, and do not forget your potential liability.

Remember that more than one method will usually be required to satisfy objectives for an area in the facility. It is unlikely that any single method will satisfy all of the objectives, and you should not expect one method to do so.

Plan for contingencies. After you have selected your methods for an area, consider several “what if” situations which may render your solutions ineffective (such as, “What if the camera malfunctions?”, or “What if the staff member is away from his/her station on a break?”). Do not forget that both equipment and staff become unavailable at times, and back up provisions are needed.

QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspection.

SUBJECT: DEFINING SUPERVISION

NAME _____

NUMBER: 62

DATE _____

1. Detecting unauthorized absence is an objective associated with what function?

- a. Identifying
- b. Reacting
- c. Dysfunctional

2. Inmates should not be aware that their actions are being monitored.

TRUE _____ FALSE _____

3. Observing an inmate through bars or windows would be considered

- a. Direct Contact
- b. Secondary Contact
- c. Remote Observation

4. CCTV is the most effective method of supervision for all applications.

TRUE _____ FALSE _____

5. Audio monitoring of inmates is considered

- a. Direct Contact
- b. Secondary Contact
- c. Remote Observation

CREDIT: 1/2 HOUR CREDIT FOR JAIL IN-SERVICE TRAINING REQUIREMENT.

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR OR TRAINING OFFICER

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