

JAIL BULLETIN

NUMBER 103
1993

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

The Jail Bulletin is a monthly feature of the Crime Commission Update. The Bulletin may be used as a supplement to your jail in-service training program if officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz. The Bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for use by your staff. We welcome any jail training material you would like to contribute to the Bulletin.

INMATE PERSONAL CHECKS AND COUNTS

Inmate personal checks and headcounts are an extremely vital component of a jail's security program. Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff view inmates personally at least once every hour and document these checks. The Standards also require that staff count inmates at least four times a day and record the counts. Performing these duties will help increase the effectiveness of your security program through better supervision and an increased staff awareness of existing and potential problems within the jail.

INMATE PERSONAL CHECKS

At a minimum, personal checks should include observing each inmate at least hourly to make sure they are alive and well. Jail officers should be able to see the inmate's flesh and observe breathing if an inmate is in his/her bunk. The use of dummies made by fashioning a fake head with materials found in the jail and gluing human hair to it is an old trick that inmates have used to successfully facilitate escapes. Officers have a responsibility to make sure a "sleeping" inmate is not a fake or a dead one. They also have the professional duty to avoid disturbing a sleeping inmate whenever possible.

Jail Standards' hourly inmate check requirement is a minimum. Many jails have a policy to perform more frequent checks because much can happen during the period of an hour when an officer is not in the cell area. An inmate can commit suicide in only four (4) minutes by hanging or strangulation. A physical or sexual assault can take place in a very short period of time. More frequent checks should be made for high risk inmates such as those considered

suicidal, intoxicated inmates, inmates in disciplinary or medical isolation, escape risks, or others with special problems. Inmate check should be varied at different times during the hour so inmates are not able to determine exactly when an officer will be present in the cell area.

In addition to checking the physical condition of inmates, the time spent in the cell areas during personal checks provides opportunities for the following supervisory and security tasks:

Violations of Jail Rules - Officers should observe the cell areas for evidence of rule violations and note any unusual odors (marijuana, alcohol).

Inmate Requests - Inmates may use this opportunity to request supplies, telephone calls, medical services, etc. Depending on your jail's policy, these requests may be verbal or in writing. It is recommended the requests for non-emergency medical, legal, mental health services, or equipment repair be written on a request slip so the request and action taken is documented.

Cleanliness - Although inmates are required to clean their living areas daily, officers should be aware of any special maintenance or cleanliness problems that can develop during the day.

Interaction with Inmates - Discussions with inmates allow officers to get an idea of their emotional well-being, problems between inmates, and a general awareness of the jail environment.

Security Problems - In addition to the official daily security check of the cells, windows, bars and doors, officers would routinely inspect security equipment when in the jail to ensure all is in working condition and has not been tampered with.

INMATE COUNTS

There are three different types of inmate counts as defined by the National Sheriff's Association:

- (1) Formal Count - A scheduled required count of all inmates in the jail. This type of count is required by Jail Standards at least (4) times each day.
- (2) Census Count - Usually done on work details, during inmate exercise or in other situations where inmates are out of their cells but under an officer's supervision.
- (3) Emergency Counts - Conducted after an escape, disturbance, evacuation of the jail, etc.

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Depending on the size of the jail and inmate population, inmate counts may be an easy or difficult process. Some small jails count inmates during every inmate check. Most jails perform three (3) of the four (4) required counts during meal times for convenience. It is important to count the inmates, not just the number of meals going into a cell area.

As with inmate checks, counts require that officers actually see the inmate. Counts should not be performed by calling out an inmate's name and assuming the correct person answered. If a large number of inmates are housed in the same cell block, it is a good practice to conduct a count with two officers to avoid confusion.

If a count does not coincide with the number of inmates that are supposed to be in the jail, officers should follow their department's written policy and procedure on the subject. Most policies require an immediate re-count, notification of supervisor, and an investigation if the reason for the inconsistency cannot be found.

DOCUMENTATION

Jail Standards require proper documentation of all inmate check and counts. These records are thoroughly reviewed during each annual jail inspection. Documenting these checks and counts gives officers a certain amount of liability protection because it provides a written record that they are performing this aspect of their job. An officer who does not actually make the check or count, but simply checks off the form or fills in the appropriate blank is jeopardizing his/her job and the safety of inmates and other staff members. These type of records are usually the first ones examined if there is a suicide, escape, or other unusual occurrence in the jail and may be used as evidence in court if the department becomes involved in a law suit.

QUIZ

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

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SUBJECT: **Inmate Personal Checks and Counts** NAME _____

DATE _____

- 1 Jail Standards requires inmate checks be performed:
 - a. At least four (4) times a day
 - b. At least once a day
 - c. At least hourly
 - d. Only during a full moon.
2. It is possible for an inmate to commit suicide by hanging or strangulation in only _____ minutes.
3. Name three (3) types of inmates that require more frequent checks.
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
4. Name three (3) types of inmate counts:
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
5. What does Your Department's Policy and Procedure Manual require if an inmate count does not coincide with the number of inmates that should be in the jail?

CREDIT: One hour credit for jail in-service training requirement

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2. It is possible for an inmate to commit suicide by hanging or strangulation in only 4 minutes.
3. Name three (3) types of inmates that require more frequent checks.
 - (1) Suicidal
 - (2) Escape Risks
 - (3) Intoxicated
 - (4) Inmates in Isolation
 - (5) Others with Special Problems
4. Name three (3) types of inmate counts:
 - (1) Formal Counts
 - (2) Census Counts
 - (3) Emergency Counts
5. What does Your Department's Policy and Procedure Manual require if an inmate count does not coincide with the number of inmates that should be in the jail?

Answer depends on the requirements in your department's Policy and Procedure Manual. Answer accordingly.

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ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR.