

# 'Super max' prison has its foes

BY MATT KRASNOWSKI  
COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

**SPRINGFIELD** — Against what seems to be overwhelming support, a small but vocal human rights group is warning that a proposed "super-maximum security" prison is destined to be an embarrassment to Illinois.

Gov. Jim Edgar's Task Force on Crime and Corrections recommended building a \$60 million, 600-inmate penitentiary to house inmates that cause the most violence within the prison system.

Both chambers of the General Assembly, the Illinois Department of Corrections and prison officers support it. Edgar backs the facility in concept but wants further consideration of lower cost alternatives.

Supporters believe the facility will help decrease inmate-on-staff violence, which has been on the rise as the state's prison population has ballooned to 50 percent over its designed capacity.

But opponents believe the super-max will be a "sadistic" facility that will produce lawsuits, international condemnation for human rights violations and do nothing to cut prison gang influence or violence.

The super-max proposal is based on the federal prison in Marion, where inmates spend nearly all day in their cells, contact visits with guests are rarely granted and non-compliance with staff requests is sometimes met with beatings.

Other states have already established state versions of this facility, in a trend that a human rights group called the "Marionization" of the U.S. prison system.

The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, protesting the proposed Illinois facility, cites examples of abuse and failure in Indiana's 104-inmate Maximum Control Complex in Westville, and California's 1,056-inmate Security Housing Unit at Pelican Bay.

"There's not one of these institutions (supporters) can point to that's had a success," said Erica Thompson of the anti-lockdown group, which was formed in 1985 to end human rights violations at the southern Illinois federal prison.

In California, a class-action suit has been filed to determine whether the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment, which bars cruel and unusual punishment, applies to the California facility's conditions.

A slight step out of line was greeted with the "cell extraction" procedure, says Dr. Corey Weinstein, a board member of the California Prisoners Rights Union. In this process, inmates are shot with a pellet gun, stunned by tasers and hog-tied.

Since the filing of the lawsuit, reports of this abuse have decreased, he said.

Weinstein said fights between inmates have been set up by prison officers — rival inmates

## Opponents believe the super-max will be a "sadistic" facility.

sometimes are housed together.

"I was shocked and even horrified by the situation there, and I've been working in prison rights advocacy for two decades."

Striking out against officers does not stop either, he said. Inmates "gas" guards by creating a mix of urine and feces and spraying it in their faces; they also "spear" guards with homemade darts.

"Compared to the level of abuse from guard to inmate, it's trivial," Weinstein said.

The California facility has been used as an inmate interrogation center, and that has led to greater inmate-on-inmate violence, Weinstein said. Inmates call this system "snitch, parole or die."

Prison officials offer release from the California unit to inmates if they provide information about the activities of their fellow prison gang members.

"Everybody who comes out... is thought to be a snitch by everyone else. You have to prove you're not," he said.

The inmates are released into an adjacent maximum security facility, which Weinstein says is called the "sticking yard" because of the large number of stabbings there.

When the facility opened in 1989, reported inmate-on-inmate assaults jumped to 1,809 from 1,243 the year before. However, statistics from the California Department of Corrections indicate the violence leveled off to 1,488 in 1991 or 1.6 assaults for every 100 inmates.

Also, fatal assaults on inmates fell to a 20-year low in 1991 with four.

The rate of inmate-on-staff violence has decreased to one assault for every 100 inmates in 1991 from 1.2 per 100 in 1988. But the number of staff assaults hit a 20-year high of 1,194 in 1991.

California Corrections spokeswoman Solange F. Brooks said the department could not comment on allegations in the suit, but said the facility has played a part in reducing inmate-on-staff violence.

In the special Indiana prison, inmates have conducted hunger strikes to protest human rights

violations at the 11-month-old unit, Thompson said.

It has even been cited by Amnesty International, a London-based human rights organization, for alleged poor treatment of inmates.

"One prisoner cut off his finger and sent it to the ACLU to try to bring attention to the fact they were being absolutely destroyed by being held in isolation in there," she said.

Also, the threat of violence has not decreased in Indiana prisons.

Since the Indiana facility opened last July, a separate

maximum security prison has been on "lockdown," where programs are shut down and inmates rarely leave their cells.

The lockdown was spurred by a demonstration staged outside the prison in protest of the new facility, she said.

In addition, not only violent inmates are placed in these facilities, opponents charge. Prisoners who file several lawsuits, are outspoken about prison conditions or are assertive also have been known to quickly end up in super-max facilities.

Once in the facilities, prisoners rights groups contend, inmates have been known to become even more anti-social.

At both the Indiana and California units, inmates are in their cells 22½ to 23 hours a day.

Facility No.: 1070050001  
Public Notice No.: 93011

Date: April 19, 1993

### NOTICE OF CLOSURE CLOSURE NO. C697

A plan to close the HACO, Inc. hazardous waste storage unit has been submitted to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) pursuant to Subpart G of 35 Ill. Adm. Code 725: HACO, Inc. is located in Atlanta, Illinois. The hazardous waste storage unit is a single area enclosed by a roof structure.

The facility will remain open during and following the closure of the hazardous waste unit. The main activity for the facility in the future will be storage of agricultural products that are waiting for distribution to retail outlets. Some outside contract work may allow HACO, Inc. to continue formulating product but at a reduced scale. After closure of the hazardous waste unit is completed, and hazardous waste stored on-site would not be allowed to remain any longer than ninety days.

Within 30 days of the first publication date of this notice, interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the plan or request modifications of the plan, or provide information on the release, at any time, of hazardous waste constituents from the facility. Written comments must be addressed to: IEPA Government and Community Affairs, Attn: Virginia Wood, P.O. Box 19276, 2200 Churchill Road, Springfield, Illinois 62794-9276, telephone number 217/782-5562.

The unit must be closed in accordance with the standards set forth in the Environmental Protection Act, Ill. Rev. Stat., Ch. 111½ Pars. 1001 et seq., and regulations adopted thereunder.

The proposed closure plan, closure performance requirements, and other documents are available for inspection and may be copied at the IEPA's Springfield headquarters.

An appointment to copy or inspect the proposed closure plan must be made in advance by contacting the Bureau of Land Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) coordinator at 2200 Churchill Road, P.O. Box 19276, Springfield, Illinois 62794-9276, telephone number 217/782-6760. Please refer to the closure number under the heading at the top of this advertisement when contacting the FOIA coordinator.

In response to requests or at the discretion of the IEPA, a public hearing may be held to clarify one or more issues concerning the closure plan. Public notice will be issued 30 days before any public hearing.



Are You Still Searching  
For An Affordable Education?

You Can Find What You're Looking  
For At Heartland Community College!

The Courier-News, IL 5/10/93