

Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center

Summary

The Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) is the primary custody facility for inmates sentenced to jail in Sacramento County and operates in conjunction with the Sacramento County Main Jail (SCMJ). The investigation of RCCC began with researching background information prior to touring the facility as part of the grand jury's charge to monitor prison facilities in the county pursuant to Penal Code Section 919(b).

Jurors took note that the SCMJ is operating under a legal consent decree to limit overcrowding to achieve a safer environment for staff, as well as the inmates housed there. The RCCC, with its antiquated design, houses approximately the same number of inmates as SCMJ, but has no such limitation on inmate population. The population of SCMJ is limited to 2,432 by Consent Decree and the population of RCCC varies from 2,100-2,400 daily. Based on the Sacramento County Inspector General (IG) report, private consultants and management reviews, staffing at RCCC should be expanded to achieve a safer environment for staff and inmates. The Inspector General reiterated his comments concerning RCCC in the 2009 Sacramento County Annual Report and thus one must ask: "Is anyone listening?" What shocking events at RCCC will it take to get the attention of those responsible for prioritizing and budgeting for the safety of employees and the inmate population placed in their care?

Throughout this report the terms "administration" and "management" are utilized. Administration refers to the Sacramento County Sheriff and to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors. RCCC management refers to captain-level deputies.

Repeated recommendations on developing a serious long-term solution for this aging facility appear to have fallen on deaf ears. To date, plans for improvements at RCCC have been presented to administration by management but have been met with patchwork solutions or have been ignored. These plans include recommendations to upgrade minimum-security housing to medium-security housing. Although there may be little chance of funding the necessary modifications to effect long-term changes at RCCC in today's economic environment, formulating a comprehensive long-term plan for improvement is a must. Continuing current trends of staff reductions without thoroughly assessing the effect on safety and potential legal consequences could ultimately cost the county in workers' compensation or lawsuits initiated by the inmate population.

Background and Facts

The Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) is the primary custodial facility for inmates sentenced to Sacramento County Jail, and is the adjunct facility for over-capacity pre-trial inmates from the SCMJ. Additionally, inmates arrested in the southern portion of the county, as well as parole violators, are held there awaiting hearings. State and federal prisoners, as well as prisoners from other counties, are held on a reciprocal basis. Some federal inmates are housed on a contractual basis for the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. RCCC is classified as a medium security facility and serves as the primary reception and transportation hub for all defendants sentenced to state prison. The Sacramento Sheriff's Department is responsible for the operation of both the SCMJ and RCCC.

Initially built as an Air Force base, RCCC was deeded to the county in 1947, and converted to a jail facility around 1960, with a capacity to house 750 inmates. RCCC is older than the SCMJ by several decades and is located in south Sacramento County near Elk Grove. RCCC is bordered by a shooting range on the north, a county road on the east, an airfield on the west and industrial buildings on the south. There is little land available for expansion. RCCC is unique in that there are distinctively different facilities, in a campus-like layout, incorporated into one overall operation. The facility includes units for minimum (honor), medium-security, and maximum-security inmates, along with a medical housing unit, and a women's detention facility.

The minimum-security facility has seven housing units ranging from old military barracks to modern pod-style buildings overseen by centralized control rooms. The maximum-security area is divided between two sections holding a maximum of 393 beds. Each of the housing units within RCCC have been added to or upgraded at different times in a hodge-podge fashion. This is demonstrated by an abundance of chain-link fences and key-locked gates that separate units and require escorts for prisoner movement to and from various activities, which is labor intensive.

RCCC offers several programs and services for inmates. Some of the programs provided are religious services, mental health services, substance abuse programs as well as vocational and education programs. Printing, engraving, and graphics are vocational programs offered in a newly constructed classroom/office building. Teachers for adult education classes are provided by the Elk Grove Unified School District using modular classrooms. Correctional staff expressed concerns about RCCC's ability to offer valuable non-mandated programs should additional funding cuts occur.

Method of Investigation

The grand jury visited and toured both the SCMJ and the RCCC facilities. The grand jury interviewed numerous staff in the sheriff's department, reviewed numerous reports and other documents to gain an understanding of the challenges facing the sheriff's department during this time of extreme budgetary stress.

Issues

During its investigation the grand jury identified multiple issues that face RCCC. We will discuss those that are most critical.

Staffing

In the September 2009 Jail Operations Audit, the Sacramento County Inspector General reviewed many issues affecting the sheriff's department and specifically, jail operations.

The IG's report and the Management and Planning Bureau (MAP) study³⁶ recommends staffing at RCCC should be 243 positions. The sheriff's department has only authorized 183 positions and only filled 175 of the authorized positions as of the date of the study. This would mean a 60-position difference in the recommended staffing and the actual positions authorized, and a 68-position difference in the actual positions filled.

This report was followed by an internal RCCC report titled *Jail Overcrowding and Safety Concerns at RCCC*.³⁷ The report asserts "minimal resources coupled with an increasing demand for services . . . predicts that overcrowding and low staffing levels will exacerbate unsafe conditions at RCCC, leading to chronic non-compliance with regulatory mandates, as reported by the California Correctional Standards Authority in their biennial inspections."³⁸ As stated in the 2008 and 2009 IG reports, the number of inmate-on-inmate assaults increased from 187 to 201 and the number of assaults on staff increased from 5 to 13. While this may or may not be a trend, the numbers are alarming.

Structure

RCCC is an old facility initially built as an Air Force base. Many changes have been made to upgrade the facility to house more dangerous inmates and to provide options for managing a diverse inmate population. The reality is that the upgrade efforts have not kept up with the need. Other than upgrading the minimum-security (honor) facility to a more secure

³⁶ Report commissioned by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors in 2006.

³⁷ November 2008

³⁸ 2008 Biennial California Correctional Standards Authority Report on RCCC and California Code of Regulations – Adult Standards – Title 15

environment, there probably are not many construction upgrades short of constructing a new facility that will improve staff and inmate safety at RCCC.

Modular classrooms are located near the boundary of the property. During the grand jury tour, members noticed there were no security cameras in the classrooms and the only personal alarm device was a telephone. Personal alarm devices are utilized to notify custody staff of a problem or potential problem within a specific area of the jail. Since the tour, over 300 cameras were added and are in use throughout RCCC. These cameras are a great addition; however, they cannot replace the physical presence of a deputy and the direct observation of inmates as required by state law. When a senior RCCC staffer was asked if the installation of cameras had reduced the amount of inmates-on-inmate crime, his response was, "no." The cameras have helped staff identify the inmates involved during these infractions.

The RCCC management has been very flexible and creative in managing a dangerous environment with substandard staffing levels. The physical size of the facility as well as its layout requires deputies to escort inmates to different activities. This requirement removes the deputy from the housing unit where he/she is needed to provide the mandated security. This leaves inmates without proper supervision in the housing units. Despite the efforts of the management team, this facility constitutes an unsafe environment for staff and inmates by any reasonable standard.

Additional Factors

Another aspect of the budgetary impacts on RCCC must be mentioned. RCCC has the unique ability and responsibility to supervise female inmates on the same grounds. The Sandra Larson Facility (SLF), formerly the Women's Detention Facility, houses female minimum, medium and maximum-security inmates in a totally separate and self-contained facility. The facility consists of a booking facility, visiting areas, classrooms, a dining hall and kitchen, all specifically for female inmates. A vocational restaurant training program at RCCC, gives female inmates job skills that qualify them for a number of jobs in the food service industry. Absent this facility, female inmates would need to be housed at the main jail and without this vocational training opportunity.

There are strong indications that the sheriff's department may close this women's facility because of budget reduction decisions by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors. Aside from the unfortunate loss of the unique opportunities that are available to female inmates at this facility, there is also the issue of gender equality that could arise from loss of this portion of RCCC.

Budget cuts most often occur in the context of staffing reductions, and/or the closure of housing units. Recent early prisoner releases, in accordance with legislative changes, (Penal Code, section 3000.3, January 25, 2010) may initially reduce the inmate population at RCCC.

The thrust of recent court proceedings is to release low-risk non-violent offenders to programs such as home detention or work release. This is done to reduce the cost of housing inmates and save operating costs. This may allow closure of smaller sections of the facility, but the long-term effect of this law and legal strategy is yet to be determined. With the closure of housing units at RCCC, there would be no space for the overflow of inmates from SCMJ. If early released inmates from the state correctional system re-offend in significant numbers, RCCC will need to provide the necessary housing.

Findings

Finding 1.0 The number of inmates in the minimum-security section at RCCC will likely continue to decrease as a percentage of the total inmate population as the courts pursue alternatives to incarceration for low-risk non-violent offenders. As a consequence an increase in the custody level of inmates will occur.

Recommendation 1.1 The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the Sacramento County Sheriff should implement the management recommended conversion of the minimum security housing to medium security housing.

Recommendation 1.2 The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, the Sacramento County Sheriff, and RCCC should develop and adopt a long-term comprehensive plan, to address the needs of the changing inmate population.

Finding 2.0 The aging infrastructure of RCCC, with its abundance of fences and key-locked gates, is labor intensive and requires higher staffing levels to insure the safety of staff and inmates.

Recommendation 2.1 The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the Sacramento County Sheriff should staff RCCC to the level recommended by the Corrections Standards Authority, the Inspector General and internal management.

Finding 3.0 The modular classrooms are remote and deputy response to an emergency situation may not occur in sufficient time to avoid a major incident.

Recommendation 3.1 The RCCC Management Team should provide a personal alarm device for summoning assistance to the adult education teachers.

Finding 4.0 The Sandra Larsen Facility for female inmates offers a vocational program not available at the SCMJ.

Recommendation 4.1 Funding to house female inmates and the vocational education program at the Sandra Larsen Facility should continue.

Response Requirements

Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Sacramento County Superior Court by October 1, 2010, from:

- **The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors**
- **Sacramento County Sheriff John McGinness**

Mail or hand-deliver a hard copy of the response to:

**Hon. Steve White, Presiding Judge
Sacramento County Superior Court
720 9th Street, Dept. 47
Sacramento, CA 95814**

In addition, email the response to Becky Castaneda, Grand Jury Coordinator, at castanb@saccourt.com