

BURTON CREEK (TAHOE) SHERIFF'S SUBSTATION, COURT FACILITIES AND JAIL INSPECTION

Background/Summary

California Penal Code § 919 requires the Grand Jury to inspect the Placer County Main and Minimum Security Jails to evaluate conditions and management of these facilities, to inquire about prisoners not indicted and to review any changes implemented since the previous Grand Jury's inspections.

On September 13, 2000, the Grand Jury visited the County's Burton Creek facility, a short distance east of Tahoe City. This two-story wood-frame building, constructed in 1959, houses the area's Sheriff's Substation, Jail, Court facilities, the Court Clerk's Office and the Deputy District Attorney's Office.

The Grand Jury notes the following concerns:

- ❖ The building is made of wood, yet lacks a sprinkler system, a hazard for workers, inmates and visitors.
- ❖ The present building configuration requires prisoners to be escorted to the courtroom via the public entrance, a danger to witnesses, victims and other members of the public.
- ❖ The facility is too small and inadequate for its required functions, lacking working room for employees and requiring cargo containers for storage of records, evidence and other essentials.
- ❖ The building lacks a fire escape from the second floor, a hazard for all who enter there.

The last six Placer County Grand Juries have criticized the dangerous conditions and the Fire Marshals have regularly agreed with its findings. The Grand Juries have concluded that the Burton Creek facility must be replaced as soon as possible. The County believes replacement may happen by 2005. The County has informed the Grand Jury that it intends to build a separate corridor connecting the jail and the courtroom to provide separation between prisoners and the public by fiscal 2000-2001, but declines to install a sprinkler system.

The 2000-2001 Grand Jury believes nothing short of complete replacement can provide the level of safety and adequacy required of public buildings.

Discussion

Eleven years ago, the County approved and funded the replacement of the County's Burton Creek facility, just east of Tahoe City, but that replacement never happened.

In his most recent evaluation, dated January 31, 2001, the Fire Marshal of North Tahoe Fire Protection District reported that "as in previous years, this facility does not meet current standards for fire protection. Specifically, 1) No automatic fire sprinkler system, 2) Insufficient occupancy separation between the jail and the rest of the building. I fear that should a fire occur in the building, the fire would spread rapidly through the old construction and open attic. A fire of this nature would pose a threat to the inmates due to the lack of adequate protection systems. If the building is not going to be replaced, then I recommend the building be retrofit [sic] with a total fire sprinkler system." (See Exhibit 1)

This Grand Jury agrees with past Grand Juries and the Fire Marshal that the building is dangerous and outmoded and needs to be replaced. Of particular concern is the safety of the Sheriff's personnel on duty in the communications area of the second floor. Although there are two stairways for exiting the second floor, the one nearest these personnel is very narrow and steep. The County accepts that the communications antenna attached to the outside wall of the facility does not constitute an emergency exit. **Any fire not immediately controlled would pose a life threatening situation to prisoners as well as Sheriff's personnel who are on duty 24-hours a day.** The County reports no intent to install an exterior fire escape from the communications room as it would cost in excess of \$10,000.

There are additional safety concerns in this building. Prisoners, for instance, must be brought to court using the same entrance as the general public, passing within reach of victims, witnesses and other public members.

There are also major adequacy concerns with this outdated facility. For instance, Burton Creek lacks adequate fireproof storage space for records, evidence and other essentials. Short-term needs are met by purchased cargo containers. These containers have been in use for several years, but are not fireproof.

The County acknowledges the building's safety concerns, but does not intend to replace it before 2005. The Grand Jury was pleased to learn that the Board of Supervisors and County Executive Officer re-prioritized completion of a new facility from 2011, as stated in their response to the 1999-2000 Grand Jury report, to 2005.

The County has extended a fire and smoke alarm system throughout the building, but has no plans to add a sprinkler system to the building. The County has agreed to build a separate corridor connecting the jail and the courtroom during the 2000-2001 fiscal year.

The Grand Jury commends the County for these steps, but believes it would be more economical in the long run to replace the building. Anything short of complete replacement will not provide an adequate margin of safety, nor the space and efficiency needed now and in the years ahead. The Grand Jury urges the County to replace the building within the next four years.

Finding 1

The Burton Creek facility is unsafe and inadequate. The County agrees it will be replaced no later than 2005.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer disagree partially with the finding. The building is inadequate as outlined in the findings of this report and past reports of the Grand Jury; however, the building is safe to occupy and the County will continue to improve the safety and functionality of it while planning for a replacement facility. Also, replacement of the facility by 2005 is dependent on available funding and approval of plans by TRPA and other agencies.***

Recommendation 1

The Board of Supervisors should commit to completing the replacement of the facility within the next four years.

- ***The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but it will be implemented in the future. However, it is not possible at this time to submit a detailed schedule or timeframe to implement the recommendation.***
- ***The estimated cost to replace the Substation is \$11 million dollars and funding to complete the replacement must be identified before detailed design and construction can proceed. However, the FY 2001-2002 Budget includes funding to prepare the site for future replacement, which will involve relocation of other county operations that have shared this site. The responses of the Sheriff and the Director of Facility Services are also included with this response.***

(Note: the following recommendations require implementation if the facility will not be replaced in the next four years.)

Finding 2

The present building, although two story and wood frame, is without a sprinkler system. The County has installed an alarm system, but has no plans to install a sprinkler system in the building.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer agree with the finding.***

Recommendation 2

Install a sprinkler system throughout the structure.

- ***The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not financially feasible.***
- ***The cost of construction for the recommended system retrofit would be unreasonable relative to the value of the building and measures taken by the County to make the building safe in case of a fire. The County believes that the existing smoke alarm system in conjunction with the fire evacuation plan provides an acceptable level of safety for the occupants of the building on a 24-hour basis.***

Finding 3

The employees who work in the second story have a choice of two internal stairways in an emergency. One of these is quite narrow and steep. This is not a safe nor quick method to exit in an emergency.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer disagree partially with the finding. Although rapid emergency exit from the building may be limited, the smoke and fire detection system are adequate to permits occupants to evacuate the building if a fire occurs.***

Recommendation 3

Add a second story outside fire escape immediately.

- ***The recommendation will not be implemented.***
- ***Adequate emergency exiting by occupants of the building is provided by the existing interior stairways and by the installation of the smoke and fire detection system. The responses of the Sheriff and the Director of Facility Services are also included with this response.***

Finding 4

Inmates are brought through the public entrance of the Courtroom in close proximity to staff and the public, posing a safety hazard for everyone. The County has indicated a new corridor will be built during the 2000-2001 construction season.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer agree with the finding.***

Recommendation 4

The Grand Jury recommends the County proceed with this addition immediately.

- ***The recommendation has not yet been implemented but it will be implemented in the future.***
- ***The County Budget for FY 2000-2001 included an appropriation of \$65,000 from the County General Fund to construct a new and separate corridor for the movement of inmates into the Courtroom that would eliminate contact with the public and staff within the facility. However, the Courts have indicated that they wish to review and consider other alternatives including audio/video technology for court operations. The funding for this project has been carried over into FY 2001-02 for construction of the new corridor if the Court decides to proceed with this option. The responses of the Sheriff and the Director of Facility Services are also included with this response.***

Finding 5

There is insufficient fireproof storage space for records, evidence and other essentials.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer agree with the finding.***

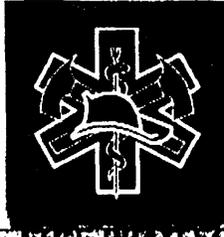
Recommendation 5

Obtain additional fireproof storage cabinets.

- ***The recommendation has not yet been implemented but it will be implemented in the future. As indicated in the response from the Sheriff, he will add the necessary amount of file storage cabinets at the Burton Creek Facility.***

Respondents

Placer County Board of Supervisors
Placer County Executive Officer
Placer County Facility Services Director
Placer County Sheriff-Coroner-Marshal



NORTH TAHOE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Serving the California Communities on the North and West Shores of Lake Tahoe

California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection
Office of the State Fire Marshal
Code Enforcement
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

January 31, 2001

RE: Inspection of Placer County Jail, Tahoe City

On January 31, 2001 an inspection of the jail facility at 2501 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe City was conducted.

Other than lack of an automatic fire sprinkler system, only minor violations were noted.

It should be noted, as in previous years, that this facility does not meet current standards for fire protection. Specifically, 1) No automatic fire sprinkler system, 2) Insufficient occupancy separation between the jail and the rest of the building.

A significant improvement has been made during the last year by installation of a complete fire alarm and detection system now installed throughout the building. Although this does not provide early extinguishment or containment such that a sprinkler system would provide, it does provide for early detection and notification. The system is monitored by both the local on site dispatch center and by Roseville Telephone, which provides for notification between the hours of 0330 – 0730 when the dispatch center is currently closed.

It should be noted that plans to remodel or replace this building have been consistently placed on hold. I fear that should a fire occur in the building, the fire would spread rapidly through the old construction and open attic. A fire of this nature would pose a threat to the inmates due to the lack of adequate protection systems.

If the building is not going to be replaced, then I recommend the building be retrofit with a total fire sprinkler system.

PO Box 5879 • 300 North Lake Boulevard • Tahoe City, California 96145
Business: Phone 530-583-6913 / Fax 530-583-6909 • Division of Fire & Life Safety: Phone 530-583-6930 • Emergency 9-1-1

EXHIBIT 1, PAGE 1 OF 2

Should you have any further questions, please contact Fire Marshal Bryce Keller or myself at (530) 583-6930.


William Atchley
Fire Captain

cc: Board of Corrections
Placer County Board of Supervisors
Placer County Grand Jury (Special request)

Captain J.K. Hawthorne, PCSO
~~Placer County Facility Services~~
Chief Whitelaw

EXHIBIT 1, PAGE 2 OF 2