

# CALIFORNIA MEN'S COLONY (CMC) INSPECTION REPORT



## SUMMARY

When members of the 2008-2009 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury visited the California Men's Colony on September 29 and 30, 2008, they became concerned about decibel and particulate levels in Prison Industry Authority (PIA) areas where inmates work. The institution is making some changes in those areas and recent testing revealed those levels meet industry standards. The Grand Jury was also assured that penalties are in place to help prevent smuggling of contraband such as cigarettes and cell phones into the prison. An official of CMC told the Grand Jury he is working with officials from other prisons across the state to have the penalty for smuggling or possession of a cell phone increased to felony status. Mutual respect between line staff and inmates was evident.

## AUTHORITY

Section 919(b) of the California Penal Code mandates grand juries to inspect prisons within their county each year.

## METHOD

The California Men's Colony (CMC) has two separate facilities, East and West. CMC West opened in 1954 and CMC East opened in 1961. Grand Jury members spent two days touring both facilities, meeting with CMC administrative staff and PIA officials, visiting programs and services offered and eating with inmates in the dining room.

## NARRATIVE

CMC is the third largest prison in California. Prisons are ranked from security level I (least secure, fewer guns, prisoners have more privileges) to IV (highest level of security, prisoners locked up most of the time). CMC East is a level III/IV security prison, while CMC West is level I/II. CMC East houses 5% that are level IV (mostly inmates with medical and mental health needs). Both facilities house considerably more inmates than they were designed to hold, as shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

**Designed Bed Space and Count 8/27/08**

Facility Level	Design Capacity	Count
I/II (West)	1,459	2,814
III/IV (East)	2,425	3,720
TOTAL	3,884	6,534

CMC West houses minimum security inmates in dormitory settings. It operates a camp program that includes fire suppression, conservation and other community service work. CMC East houses medium security inmates and is divided into four quadrangles, each of which has its own dining room, classrooms, athletic field and housing units. It also has a licensed acute care hospital and provides a mental health crisis unit for temporary housing of inmates experiencing crises. These inmates receive group therapy, one-on-one therapy and a wide array of supportive services, depending on the severity of their mental illness. As jurors toured the facilities, it was evident that there was mutual respect between line staff and inmates.

The Grand Jury interviewed an official of CMC to discuss contraband in the institution and how inmate complaints are processed. It was learned that there are safeguards and disciplinary measures in place to address both inmate complaints and the possession of cigarettes and cell phones. The possession of such is prohibited for both inmates and most staff on the institution's grounds. The official told the Grand Jury that he sees cell phones as a serious safety threat, and is working with other prison officials to have the Legislature declare possession or smuggling of cell phones into state prisons a felony.

CMC offers a variety of programs for inmates, including the following:

- Prison Industry Authority: Approximately 629 inmates are employed in factories making gloves, jackets, underwear, shoes and T-shirts, as well as in a knitting mill, printing plant, laundry, warehouse and maintenance yard.

The Grand Jury observed visible airborne particulate matter in the knitting mill and became concerned for inmate health. PIA responded to our concerns by implementing a test to determine the amount of dust and lint in the air.

Testing revealed particulate matter within the mill was within normal tolerances. It should be noted that particulate masks are available to inmate employees upon request. All inmates are medically cleared for their work assignments and those with respiratory issues are not assigned to high dust level areas. After air quality tests were conducted

recently and with the prompting of the Grand Jury, PIA is currently altering the direction of some of the fans within the factory to improve air flow. There are plans in the near future to either acquire a dust collector system or a centralized air vac system to remove airborne particulates. In addition, excessive noise levels were also noted by the Grand Jury in the knitting mill and shoe factory. California Code of Regulations, Title 8, Article 105, Appendix A (CCR) establishes acceptable limits (85 dBA or less) for the amount and duration of noise to which employees can be exposed. PIA has a comprehensive Hearing Conservation Plan in place. Inmate employees are tested within the first six months of employment and every six months thereafter. If an inmate employee shows hearing loss that cannot be attributed to another cause within that time, they are reassigned to another job. Hearing protection, both the in ear foam type and headset form, is available at the inmate's request. PIA has determined that noise levels in the knitting mill, laundry and shoe factory range from 80 to 92 dBA, and has elected to implement administrative controls by limiting the length of shifts and requiring that inmate employees wear hearing protection in the noisier part of the mill. Inmate employees who fail to use hearing protection in those high risk areas can be terminated. PIA continues to investigate ways in which engineering controls, such as fan modifications, sound dampening on the walls and equipment modifications, can be used to reduce decibel levels

- Vocational Education: Classes in Auto body repair, auto mechanics, computer repair, welding, building and janitorial maintenance, data processing, dry cleaning, electronics, landscaping, machine shop, sewing machine repair and small engine repair are provided.
- Academic: Inmates can take advantage of classes in adult basic education, special education, general education, G.E.D., independent study, pre-release training, English as a Second Language, Literacy Program, Computer Literacy Lab and college correspondence leading to advanced degrees.

- Self-help programs: Smoking cessation, anger management, stress management and inmate peer education classes are optional for inmates.
- Other programs and services: In addition to all of the above programs and services offered, CMC allows some inmates to participate in community service crews, Gold Coats, Youth Diversion, religious services, Arts in Corrections, victim awareness, drug and alcohol treatment/diversion, and Cal-Fire Camp.

The Grand Jury was impressed with the operations of the Cal-Fire Camp located on the grounds of CMC. Inmates are called upon to fight wildland fires, as well as deal with hazardous materials spills throughout the state.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Grand Jury believes that CMC, which is the third largest prison in California, appears to be well managed. Staff appeared professional in performing their duties. Moreover, we observed staff and inmates showing respect for one another. Jurors were assured that there are adequate penalties and safeguards in place to restrict the smuggling of tobacco and cigarettes into the institution. Prison management would like to see stiffer penalties imposed by the Legislature on the smuggling or possession of cell phones at CMC and other prisons statewide. The San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury commends the management and staff of the California Men's Colony for their efforts to rehabilitate incarcerated felons in a humane and professional manner. The Prison Industry Authority is commended for their efforts to ensure safe working conditions for CMC inmates, including monitoring noise levels in work areas, and seeking ways to improve airborne particulate removal in sensitive areas of the knitting mill.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

No responses to this report are required.