Detention Facility Worker Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

Personnel in detention/prison facilities should be continuously aware and prepared for the risks they might face on the job. The work in these facilities can be extremely stressful—both physically and mentally for guards, custodians, or medical personnel. Detention workers also run the risk of exposure to physical attack or infection from bodily fluids.

What’s the Danger

PHYSICAL EXPOSURES: Bloodborne pathogen exposure from splashes or contact with blood is a serious hazard when violence erupts. The most common exposure is a splash of blood or other bodily fluids to an eye, nose, and mouth or a puncture from a bite, scratch, or serious wound. If you are required to respond to these emergency incidents, wear body armor, long sleeves, and pants to protect your body. Gloves and safety glasses/goggles will protect you from accidental exposure. Evaluate different types of equipment to ensure that it does not hamper your response while protecting yourself or others.

Avoid situations where an inmate can use blood, urine, or feces to attack by using proper techniques to enter an inmate’s cell. Know what to do if you are exposed, who to report it to and how to follow-up with medical attention. By receiving a vaccination for Hepatitis B, you can protect yourself from contracting the disease.

If you suspect an inmate has tuberculosis (TB), isolate and transport them for medical attention. Use respiratory protection such as an N95 respirator when entering isolation rooms or working with potentially infectious inmates. Be sure to get a yearly TB

test to ensure you have not been exposed.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

WHAT TO DO AFTER EXPOSURE

After a needlestick or cut exposure, wash the area with soap and water. For a splash exposure to the nose, mouth, or skin, flush with water. If exposure occurs to the eyes, irrigate with clean water, saline, or sterile irrigant.

Report the exposure right away to your supervisor or the person in charge. DO NOT decide on your own whether you need more care.

4 Protocols to Ensure the Safety and Security Of Correctional Officers

1. **Document Your Activities:** Documenting your activities is important, especially if inmates must be restrained or subdued after an incident. Creating a paper trail heightens the institution’s protection from federal lawsuits that inmates can file for free, while minimizing the officer’s risk of making erroneous statements at a court proceeding. If you deny a constitutional right, you must also explain those reasons in writing – such as the placement of inmates who assault each other in administrative segregation units.
2. **Isolate Gang Members:** Prison gangs strain resources to the limit and pose constant safety risks to inmates and correctional staffers. Surviving as a corrections officer depends on your ability to cultivate information about gang activities. To minimize gang influence, you must develop a system like the one proposed by California’s Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). This approach stresses identifying known gang members and associates. Once isolated from the general inmate population, gang members can be housed in special units designed to discourage their behavior.
3. **Monitor Contraband Activity:** Correctional officers must stay alert for contraband, or illegal goods and services that inmates rely on to enhance their own comfort and power.

Officers must always remind themselves that an inmate's ingenuity has no limits. For example, chewing gum will disable locks if it's applied properly, while soft drink containers may store nauseating liquids that an inmate can throw at an officer. For those reasons, you should never discard household items into a prison wastebasket. If you can imagine a common item being turned into a homemade weapon, an inmate is probably creating it.

4. **Preserve Your Integrity / Manage Stress:** Correctional officers are held to a higher conduct standard than workers in many professions. Failing to keep a professional distance from inmates has disastrous consequences.
   Correctional facilities are stressful places. Correctional officers (COs) must deal with the worst society has to offer on a daily basis and face one of the highest rates of nonfatal workplace-related injuries in the nation. Though pay rates have improved in recent years, they still lag behind the national median.

PREVENT MISTAKES/STRESS REDUCTION

Offer Targeted Training: Training plays a critical role in everything that happens at a correctional facility, but unfortunately the immediate need for guards has sometimes led to extended training falling to the wayside as COs are rushed into duty. Training must continue after orientation, especially if new policies and procedures are introduced.

If you bring a new tool into your facility, be sure the vendor offers a way to keep staff trained on the system. You also need buy-in from your supervisors, who will make sure the tools are being used correctly and in a secure manner. Failing to use a system's features, such as alerts when keys or assets aren't returned in time, can still leave you in a dangerous spot if a key were to go missing.

Promote Staff Wellness: Hollywood's depiction of COs is often that of a tough and burly man who doesn't back down from anything. While your COs are certainly tough for dealing with what they do day in and day out, they are still human. Stress and pressure can

get to them as much as anybody else in any other line of work.

If possible, offer further training courses on managing stress and de-escalating problems with other people, including inmates and fellow staff members. The more effectively people can work together, the more efficient your facility will be. Also consider coordinating discounts with local gyms or health spas to promote a healthy and well staff.

THE BEST DEFENCE – TOP PHYSICAL/MENTAL CONDITION

The level of required alertness and the unpredictable nature of the inmates in your workplace can cause stress. To help manage stress, remember to:

- Keep fit and in good overall health.
- Get the training you need to feel prepared and in control at work.
- Talk about your job tasks and stresses with your supervisor to get guidance for controlling stress.
- Get debriefing counseling individually, or as a group after emergency incidents to help you cope.

FINAL WORD

The work done by correctional officers is extremely stressful both physically and emotionally. These officers are confronted with the worst society has to offer on a consistent basis and face non-fatal workplace injuries at an alarming rate.