

SECURITY AUDIT OF THE ESTELLE HIGH SECURITY UNIT FOR THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE



FINAL REPORT

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MGT 
OF AMERICA, INC.

502 EAST 11TH STREET, SUITE 300
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78701
512-476-4697
WWW.MGTCRIMINALJUSTICE.COM

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Security Audit of the Estelle High Security Unit for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice

I: Background

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) contracted with MGT of America, Inc. to conduct an independent review of the security operations of the Estelle Unit of the TDCJ.

The Estelle Unit is a facility that was originally opened in 1984 and houses inmates in security levels G-1 to G-5. The facility has a capacity of 3,085, which includes the main facility and the expansion unit, which is the primary subject of this review. The 650 bed expansion unit houses an administrative segregation unit and other inmates requiring high security placement. The complex also includes a 136 bed regional medical facility.

The security practices and procedures of the Estelle Unit, and in particular the practices at the expansion unit (High Security Unit), have come under question as a result of the recent escape of an inmate as he was being moved from the Estelle High Security Unit to the Stiles Unit near Beaumont. While being transferred in a prison van by two correctional officers, the inmate pulled a loaded semi-automatic pistol he later claimed he obtained by paying staff to smuggle it into the Estelle facility. The inmate is alleged to have overpowered and handcuffed the escorting correctional officers, even though he had been confined to a wheelchair because of limited mobility due to a stroke he suffered several years earlier.

During the last several months concern arose from within TDCJ, and from external observers, over the number of incidents involving contraband within TDCJ units. As a result, TDCJ Executive Director Brad Livingston requested that MGT conduct an independent security audit of the Estelle Unit, with specific focus on the practices, procedures, and policies of the High Security Unit.

II: Objectives

The security audit objectives, as established by the agreement between MGT of America and TDCJ, focus on the security operations systems of the Estelle Unit, and more specifically on the security systems designed to detect, eliminate, and control contraband within the institution. The specific objectives as outlined in the formal agreement between MGT and TDCJ included the following:

- A. Review all operations, security procedures, standards, practices, protocols, and the level of compliance at the Estelle Unit with the department's written security procedures as they relate to the control of contraband, search for contraband, and the movement of offenders both internal and external to the unit.
- B. Conduct an on-site review that, at a minimum, focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of employee/visitor searches upon entering the unit's security perimeter, the effectiveness of the unit's procedures and practices as they relate to the control of contraband, and the effectiveness of the scheduled, random and routine searches of offenders and offenders' cells.
- C. Assess the overall effectiveness of the department's policies, procedures, and practices as they relate to searches for, and control of, contraband within the prison system.
- D. Review all policies, procedures, protocols and practices related to the movement of offenders involved in external transportation to courts, hospitals, transfers to other facilities, and all other scheduled appointments.

The security audit is specifically not a review or investigation of the specific circumstances and facts surrounding the escape that occurred on November 30, 2009. The audit is intended to determine if there are existing deficiencies and/or gaps in the security practices of the unit that may contribute to future breaches of security at the unit.

III: MGT Project Approach

The MGT project team was on-site at the Estelle Unit on December 16, 17, and 18, 2009. In advance of the on-site activities, the MGT consultant team was provided with written and electronic documents that included TDCJ and Estelle Unit policies, procedures, staffing patterns, post orders, and other documents, that were specifically related to the scope of work of this review.

The project team consisted of the following individuals:

Kenneth McGinnis, a partner with MGT, has been involved in virtually every aspect of correctional management and operations over the course of his 30-year public service career. Mr. McGinnis has served as the Director of the Michigan Department of Corrections and as the Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections. He also has worked as a warden in maximum, medium and minimum-security institutions and received a number of national awards for his contributions to the field of corrections. Mr. McGinnis has conducted operational reviews of correctional systems and facilities across the country, including assessments for Arizona, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Dakota, Texas, and Virginia. Mr. McGinnis also has directed a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of programs administered by the North Dakota, Vermont, and Puerto Rico correctional systems.

Larry Fields has over 30 years experience in the field of correctional administration and leadership, including prison management, community corrections, and probation and parole. He served as Director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections from 1992 to 1996. Mr. Fields started with the department nearly 30 years ago as a probation and parole officer and worked his way up the ranks as a superintendent, warden, and regional director. As director, he had total management and leadership of 5,000 employees, 51,000 offenders, 18 large major institutions, 29 small facilities, and 7 probation and parole districts.

Thomas Roth, a senior consultant with MGT, has over 30 years of experience in the field of corrections. He has been involved in virtually every facet of correctional management including central office leadership, facility management, accreditation, training, and education. Mr. Roth has served as Deputy Chief of Administration for the Illinois Department of Corrections, warden of multiple correctional institutions over a period of ten years, and accreditation auditor for the American Correctional Association for nine years. Mr. Roth has been instrumental in the completion of a staffing analysis on 50 correctional facilities in Puerto Rico.

An initial briefing was conducted with the consultant team with Executive Director Brad Livingston; Director of the Correctional Institutions Division (CID), Rick Thaler; Bryan Collier, Deputy Executive Director; Oscar Mendoza, Deputy Director Management Operations; William Stephens, Deputy Director Prison and Jail Operations; and Thomas Prasifka, Deputy Director Support Operations. During the briefing the project staff was provided documents, policies, and procedures related to the objectives of the audit. The project team was also given an overview of issues and

concerns of the executive management team, provided with an overview of system issues, actions taken in response to the concerns over the introduction of contraband, and provided an opportunity to ask questions and obtain clarification based on the information provided in advance of the site visit.

While on-site at the facility, the project team's approach was to conduct a tour of the facility and observe its operations; interview key staff in order to fully understand the operations of the facility and its strengths and weaknesses; and verify the status of the facility security systems through a review of data and records made available to the project staff.

Review Tasks: The following tasks were conducted in order to complete the review of the security operations of the Estelle Unit and the High Security Unit.

- A review of recent critical incidents and reports filed by institutional staff that were related to the discovery of contraband, drugs, and cell phones;
- The institution's overall security procedures and practices;
- Staffing practices, including post assignments and relief practices, as they relate to security and the control of contraband;
- Recent daily staffing rosters for the period of time in which the visiting room was open;
- Review of transportation unit procedures and practices;
- Security inspection reports and processes;
- Review of the operation of the main entrance point to the institution;
- Inmate movement policies and practices;
- Classification and housing practices;
- Perimeter security practices and procedures;
- Operation of the transportation gate;
- Procedures related to the assignment to housing, work and programs;
- Search and control of contraband procedures;
- Mailroom and personal property operations, including intake;
- Security post descriptions;
- Operation of video cameras;
- Staff training curriculum and training procedures;
- Tour and inspection of the key areas of the institution and security operations; and
- Observation of the operation of the institution with emphasis on practices that are related to the control of contraband.

At the conclusion of the on-site activities, the project team immediately debriefed with Executive Director Livingston, Deputy Executive Director Collier, and Director of CID Thaler. A summary of the activities completed during the course of the review was provided as was a summary of the preliminary observations and recommendations of the project team. Each functional area that was reviewed during the course of the on-site activities was summarized in terms of strengths and weaknesses and preliminary recommendations were provided.

A: Personnel Interviewed

During the course of this audit, the following personnel were formally interviewed by the MGT project team. Numerous other correctional officers and support staff were contacted and interviewed during the course of touring the facility and reviewing specific functions and post assignments within the unit.

Brad Livingston, Executive Director
Bryan Collier, Deputy Executive Director
Rick Thaler, Director, Correctional Institutions Division
Robert Treon, Regional Director
Alfonso Castillo, Senior Warden, Estelle Unit
Thomas Hunt, Assistant Warden, Estelle High Security Unit
Oscar Mendoza, Deputy Director Management Operations
William Stephens, Deputy Director Prison and Jail Operations
Thomas Prasifka, Deputy Director Support Operations
Thomas Hutt, Major
Richard Gunnels, Assistant Warden
Larry Dawson, Administrative Captain
Daryl Luker, Main Building Captain 1st Shift
David Forrest, Main Building Captain 2nd Shift
Robert Jenkins, Administrative Captain
Jody Vincent, Lieutenant 1st Shift
Gerald Curtis, Lieutenant 2nd Shift
Kim Campbell, Lieutenant
Maria Luna Brooks, Security Threat Group (STG) Sergeant
David Bates, 1st Shift Sergeant
Shelly Hanson, Health Care Administrator
Kristopher Dossey, Operational Review Sergeant
Cassandra Lee, Estelle Unit Field Training Officer
Michelle Williams, Case Manager, High Security Unit
Geannie Jones, Property Control Officer
Roy Barrett, Correctional Officer
Rachael Loveless, Correctional Officer
Marcos Garza, Correctional Officer
Rayshawn Nixon, Correctional Officer
Kelvin Scott, Senior Warden, Offender Transportation Unit
Kyle Coston, Assistant Warden, Offender Transportation Unit

B: Recent TDCJ Enhancements

In the aftermath of the recent escape, TDCJ initiated action to address several issues it identified internally to enhance the capability and reliability of security systems to prevent future incidents of this nature, and also to address ongoing concerns about staffs' ability to adequately control the introduction of contraband into the units of the system. The following summarizes some of the key initiatives taken.

- Random pat searches of individuals at the Estelle Unit have been expanded to include around-the-clock pat searches of all individuals entering and exiting the unit. During the course of this review a change was implemented in the pat search procedures that resulted in those exiting the facility now being searched on a random basis. As noted elsewhere in this report this is consistent with correctional practices found in other similar maximum type facilities.
- Wardens at all units have been directed to personally and immediately review compliance with security protocols related to transport of offenders, shakedowns, and searches.
- Installation of the walk-through metal detector at the Estelle expansion cellblock has been completed.
- In addition to the ongoing evaluation of pre-service and in-service training, an evaluation with special focus on factors contributing to the escape has been initiated. This includes a thorough review of training curricula targeting search and shakedown procedures, transportation procedures, and offender manipulation tactics and recognition.
- In addition to the review by wardens of compliance with security protocols related to transport of offenders, a more systemic review of transportation policies and procedures was initiated.
- All transportation vehicles are being inspected for potential security enhancements.

IV: Observations, Findings, and Recommendations

A: Staff Assignment and Deployment

Security personnel at the Estelle Unit are assigned primarily to one of three work locations: the Main Building, Expansion Cell Block (High Security Unit), and the Regional Medical Facility. The decision as to where personnel are assigned is initially determined by one of the assistant wardens.

An assistant warden was interviewed and shared with the project team the decision-making process of how personnel are assigned. The decision is primarily the result of a combination of factors: the number of staff currently assigned to the work location versus the number required, experience, individual requests, and to a limited degree gender in order to ensure all gender specific posts can be filled.

During the on-site review, additional interviews were conducted with various personnel who identified the following distinctions between the work locations:

- Security personnel recently completing new officer training were normally not assigned to the expansion cell block (High Security Unit). New officers were typically assigned initially to the main building and then re-assigned to the High Security Unit as vacancies occurred.
- Most correctional officers, sergeants, and lieutenants at the expansion cell block were assigned to a four-day, 12-hour work schedule. Staff worked four consecutive days followed by four days off. This shift schedule was available only at the expansion cell block.
- The Regional Medical Facility was reported to have on average the more senior staff.
- The expansion cell block housed primarily offenders in administrative segregation status.
- The seniority level (in terms of years in service in corrections) of staff assigned to the expansion cell block was reported to be less than the average seniority level of staff assigned to the main building or the Regional Medical Facility.
- The required staff training did not vary from one location to the next.

Many of the staff interviewed at the High Security Unit were thankful for the employment opportunity, but were not looking to establish a long-term commitment to TDCJ. This is not unusual from what is commonly shared with the project team in other jurisdictions when interviewing staff with less than five years of experience.

Documentation provided by the TDCJ indicates that the average years in service of security officers assigned to the Estelle main facility is 6 years, 10 months, while the average for those assigned to the Estelle High Security Unit was 5 years, 1 month. There did appear to be a number of security officers assigned to the High Security Unit who had less than two years of service. There was no established requirement that ensured that a minimum percentage of highly experienced staff were assigned to the high security cell block. Staff is assigned based on the interest of the employee, the availability of the position due to a vacancy occurring, and the abilities of the employee requesting the assignment. The assignment of experienced staff to critical posts at the High Security Unit is advantageous from an operational standpoint.

Several additional factors were examined by the project team concerning current staff assignments and staff deployment. Two of these factors included identifying the number of staff by position level and how staff are deployed. A complete staffing post analysis was not conducted, but a general overview of the deployment of staff was completed.

Number of Security Staff Assigned

Management staff reported that there were 205 security staff assigned to the Estelle expansion cell block during the review period. The following matrix provides a breakdown by position title and work schedule.

Estelle Expansion Cell Block (High Security Unit)			
Position Title	Total	12-hour Post Assignment	8-hour Post Assignment
Major	1	-	1
Captain	1	-	1
Lieutenant	7	6	1
Sergeant	13	12	1
Officer	183	180	3
Total	205	198	7

To ensure 24-hour staff coverage is provided most personnel are assigned to either the 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. shift or the 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. shift. As a result, the 180 officers, 12 sergeants and 6 lieutenants, are assigned to a 12-hour schedule. They are divided into four different work schedules to ensure appropriate 24-hour post coverage. Our initial analysis indicates that staff are assigned appropriately.

Coverage by Supervisory Staff

The following matrix identifies the number of security supervisory staff scheduled by shift on a typical day at the expansion cell block.

Estelle Expansion Cell Block (High Security Unit)				
	Seven-Day Coverage		Five-Day Coverage	
Position Title	6:00 am – 6:00 pm	6:00 pm – 6:00 am	Day Shift	Night Shift
Major	-	-	1	-
Captain	-	-	1	-
Lieutenant	2	1	1	-
Sergeant	3	3	1	-
Total	5	4	4	-

In reviewing the staffing matrix there is never fewer than four supervisory staff scheduled to be assigned to the expansion cell block. Employee call-ins or scheduled time off may impact the actual number of supervisors assigned on a specific day.

Overall a sufficient number of supervisory staff are available and were being used effectively. Significant routine activities such as the use of the BOSS Chair (electronic body scanner), preparing offenders for transport, application of restraints, actively participating in employee searches during peak periods, recreational yard movement, and receiving offender transports should all be considered priority activities to be completed while a supervisor is present. While the project team was present the supervisor participated actively during each transport overseeing the offender search in holding rooms and also during the use and operation of the BOSS Chair. The project team was impressed with the direct supervision of these activities during the on-site review.

Staff Deployment

Current post assignments are classified as either priority one or priority two posts. Priority one posts are assignments that must be filled on an ongoing basis and are considered mandatory posts. Priority two posts are discretionary posts that fulfill an established responsibility and are required to enhance the operation of the facility, but are not required to always be filled, and can be closed for brief periods of time when staff are not available or when the function does not need to be performed.

A review of the turnout roster (roster that identifies specific post assignments) identified 26 priority one posts. Priority two posts generally include a secondary rover post, corridor posts and offender shakedown and/or escort posts. While our analysis indicates that the prioritization of posts for the High Security Unit is appropriate in terms of relative importance of each post, when considering the type of offender housed at the expansion cell block most priority two posts appeared to be posts that when sufficient staff is available should be required to be filled on a daily basis. The lack of staff to man these posts on a regular basis impacts the overall security of the unit by limiting the amount of supervision during movement, restricting the time available for discretionary searches, and limiting the ability of housing unit officers to complete thorough cell inspections.

Given the overall current staffing levels at the expansion cell block, our assessment reflects that the available personnel are being deployed in an efficient manner.

However, the present deployment practices at the Estelle Unit does impact the ability of the High Security Unit to complete cell searches consistent with the provisions of established policy (Security Memorandum 03.02). This policy states that all administrative segregation cells should be searched at least once every 72 hours in a manner consistent with standard guidelines. These guidelines include searching all offender property, the mattress, and cell furnishings. Based on existing deployment practices, it is difficult to comply with the policy without relying on overtime or modifying the intent of the search as specified in the policy.

Personnel assigned to housing units are currently the primary staff members responsible for searching cells. Additional staff may be used, but the housing unit officer is designated as the primary post required to complete the cell searches. Based on staff interviews, cell searches appear to be more a cell “inspection” rather than a cell search. These searches are commonly referred to as “integrity searches” or searches where the primary intent is to ensure that the security hardware, windows, doors, and other physical components of the cell have not been tampered with by the offender. The quality of each cell search at the High Security Unit is affected by the limited amount of time and staff available to complete a search in a manner consistent with policy. These searches are in addition to the comprehensive facility searches completed twice a year and the numerous searches conducted in accordance to policies related to the management of high profile offenders, intelligence gathering searches, security threat group searches, and searches initiated in accordance with the Safe Prisons Program requirements.

Based on the project team’s observations, staff interviews, and a review of turnout rosters, there is a sufficient number of supervisory staff available at the expansion cell block and all staff are currently being deployed in critical areas. Although available personnel are being used effectively, the deployment of additional staff to complete the required comprehensive searches would significantly enhance overall security within the facility. These staff members can be obtained by a variety of means including a redeployment of existing staff, utilization of detailed staff from the Main Unit of Estelle, deployment of regional searches teams, and through the addition of staff assigned to the unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review deployment practices that would permit additional staff to be assigned or detailed to living units on a regular basis to complete the required searches of cells, common areas and work areas of the facility. As noted this additional staff can be obtained through a redeployment of existing staff or use of staff from other units.
2. Provide supplemental training for staff assigned to the expansion cell block to include additional training in critical security areas such as the operation of the BOSS Chair, checking sensor calibrations, application of restraints during normal and abnormal conditions, searching medical enabling devices, conducting thorough cell searches, and working with high-risk offenders.

B: Staff Performance and Supervision

During interviews and contact with the High Security Unit staff, genuine concern and regret was expressed regarding the recent escape and what was believed to be a failure of some staff to follow required policy. Staff at the unit take pride in the job they do in managing a very dangerous inmate population and unit. Staff readily talked about their support and approval of all the “newly” implemented procedures that have been put in place since the escape. Line officers acknowledged that in the past they had been cutting corners regarding policy compliance because of staff shortages and to meet the sheer amount of work required during a shift.

Management staff reported that there were 183 officers assigned to the expansion unit and that there were 231 officers “authorized.” The following officer breakdown by work schedule was provided.

Security Officers	12-Hour Schedule		8-Hour Schedule	Total
	1 st Shift	2 nd Shift	Day Shift	
- Authorized	134	94	3	231
- Actual	108	72	3	183
- Difference	26	22	0	48

*December 2009 as reported by Estelle Unit Assistant Warden.

It must be noted that the High Security Unit is operating with approximately 20 percent fewer officers than authorized, which can be a contributing factor to “cutting corners.” A comprehensive staffing study would provide much more detailed information about the required staffing levels based on present workloads and requirements. This type of study was not included as part of the security audit.

All personnel interviewed were pleased that staff had rededicated themselves to complete and full policy compliance. In the past, staff said they were often evaluated on achieving policy compliance but rarely on how complete or accurate they were with compliance. For example, policy requires that a specific number of cell searches must be completed and not necessarily whether these searches were comprehensive and thorough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **TDCJ should examine the definition of a cell search and clarify for staff the extent and thoroughness of the type of search that is expected under the current policy.** If the goal is to find major contraband (e.g., weapons, cell phones), then that should be stated. If the goal is to search for all types of contraband (including gang material, unauthorized property), then the directions and training of staff should be modified as should the number of staff required to complete the searches.
2. **The audit team noted a number of post orders that were dated early and mid-2000s by authority of directors who no longer work for the department.** The policy review unit should conduct a review of current post orders updating/revising operational procedures.

C: Employee Entry Searches

The current policy of searching all employees and visitors entering and exiting the expansion cell block was initiated at the Estelle expansion cell block on November 30, 2009. Prior to that date, one officer was routinely assigned to the main entrance (Gate Control post) primarily to check and verify the identification of employees and visitors. Random employee searches were previously required to be conducted five times per month on a full active shift of individuals entering the facility. No searches were being conducted on employees or visitors leaving the facility.

The project team has observed that a growing number of correctional agencies throughout the nation that are moving from random employee searches to requiring all staff to be searched upon entry into maximum or high security facilities. Searches of this nature and scope are generally required at facilities which are housing maximum security or high risk offenders and those who based on history have a high incidence of contraband incidents. The number of jurisdictions requiring staff and visitors to be searched upon leaving is substantially less and is more frequently completed on a random basis or only with cause. Searches of employees at lower security facilities are typically completed on a random basis or the result of incidents involving high levels of contraband.

The initial point of entry into the Estelle expansion cell block for all staff, volunteers, and visitors is a double gate built into the perimeter fence. The double gate area is equipped with two intercoms connected to the Central Control Center and a surveillance camera. The primary video monitors linked to the surveillance cameras are located in the Central Control Center, which is staffed 24 hours each day. Central Control personnel electronically control access through the double gates after verbal and visual confirmation is made. Only one of the two gates is allowed to be open at any time. All control systems were operating effectively at the double gate area, which prevented unauthorized or casual entry into the facility.

Upon clearance through the double gates, the current operating practice is for individual(s) to proceed to the main building entrance of the expansion cell block. Once inside the building, employees/visitors are immediately met by staff. Two staff are currently assigned to the main entrance post to assist in processing individuals through the main entrance. The two posts are gender specific posts that are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days per week to ensure established search procedures are consistently applied. Current policy is for pat-down searches to be conducted by staff of the same gender. The current employee and visitor search practice was initiated on November 30, 2009. Prior to this date, one officer was assigned to the main entrance primarily to check for proper identification. Employee searches were conducted only when reasonable suspicion was established or

as part of a random process. There was no previous department policy requiring all staff at the Estelle Unit to be searched upon entry into the facility.

The current employee search procedure now in place and observed by the project team was extremely comprehensive and consistent with accepted correctional practices found at similar maximum security facilities.

Established Employee Search Policy

All individuals entering through the main gate are required to sign-in and be subject to a search. A memorandum dated September 25, 2009, from the Director of Correctional Institutions Division (CID) to all TDCJ wardens details the employee and the visitor search procedures required. The following components are part of the established search procedures:

- ***Frequency***
 - All offender visitors shall be searched prior to entering the facility.
 - Searches of all employees and facility visitors entering a correctional facility shall be conducted at facilities with high contraband detection. Random searches of all employees and facility visitors shall be conducted at least five times monthly, at all other facilities. Search frequency will be periodically reevaluated by the CID Director. *Searches of all employees entering and exiting the Estelle Unit were initiated on November 30, 2009 and were being completed at the time of the review. Prior to this date only periodic random searches of employees entering the facility were being performed.*
 - The facility will conduct random searches of all employees and facility visitors entering the back gate. The schedule and frequency will be determined by the warden. *The expansion cell block does not have a back gate. Supervisory staff reported that personnel entering the intake sally port and kitchen gate were being searched. Observation of three separate transports did not reveal transport personnel were being searched but identification cards were being checked and vehicles were being searched.*
 - Employees or contract employees whose duty assignment is located outside the facility fence perimeter shall be searched as outlined in these procedures, at a minimum of two areas monthly.
 - Additional searches may be scheduled by the warden or regional director based on facility needs and intelligence gathering.
 - Random searches may not necessarily encompass a full 24-hour period. Specific periods of time may be selected; however, all employee work schedules will be targeted.
- ***Searches***
 - Each person shall be searched by an officer of the same gender.
 - Employees who refuse to be searched will be subject to disciplinary action.
 - Facility visitors who refuse to be searched shall be required to leave TDCJ property.

- Each person shall be searched using a metal detection device. *A hand-held metal detector was used from November 30 to December 3 and a new walk-thru metal detector was put in place on December 3, 2009.*
- The searching officer shall require the person being searched to remove their jacket, smock, cap/hat, belt and footwear. The searching officer shall physically search the items.
- The person being searched will remove all items in their pockets. The searching officer shall examine the contents and all other items being brought in by the person.
- The searching officer shall thoroughly pat search the person.
- The searching officer shall have the person lift their feet to be scanned.
- If suspicious areas are noted during the search, a supervisor shall be notified.
- **Items Allowed**
 - All persons shall be required to leave their personal cell phones, pagers or similar personal electronic devices securely locked in their vehicles. If for some reason an exception needs to be made, the warden shall provide the facility entry point written approval. This exception must be authorized by the regional director. All authorized cell phones entering the facility must be documented. *A separate logbook was available in the main entrance to document cell phone entry.*

A list of approved items by the Correctional Institutions Division to be allowed into the facility was provided by management staff (Employee/Approved Volunteer – Items Allowed). This listing was found to be consistent with contemporary correctional standards.

The security memorandum dated September 25, 2009, concerning *Search and Contraband Procedures* reported to be the first security memorandum addressing employee searches in an extended period of time. This memorandum outlines the specific search requirements and procedures to be utilized including frequency, items permitted, and the use of random searches.

The project team was provided a previous Security Memorandum, SM-02.01, addressing search of employees, property and vehicles which was dated May 12, 1992, and signed by the Deputy Director of Operations at the time. The security memorandum stated in part, “The unit warden shall authorize the search of employees, property and vehicles when a reasonable suspicion exists that threatens the physical safety of employees, inmates, and the institution.” Specific search procedures or a list of approved items were not identified in the memorandum. Based on the frequency of memorandums on this subject and on-going operational practices, searching employees was not a long-standing priority or routine practice at the Estelle Unit prior to November 30, 2009. The September 25 security memorandum is consistent with correctional best practices and covers the necessary issues and requirements of search procedures.

Process Observations

On the days of the project team's visit to the Estelle High Security Unit, there were a minimum of two staff assigned to the main entrance to process employees and visitors into the facility. Even though the existing search process was relatively new, the staff were well-trained and thorough in their approach. The following search and identification procedures were applied:

- Assigned personnel secured staff and visitor identification.
- Assigned personnel ensured visitors sign-in/out.
- Employee/Visitor signed cell phone logbook, if authorized, and when applicable.
- Employee/Visitor instructed to remove coat and/or outer garment, belt, hat, watch, and footwear.
- Employee/Visitor instructed to provide briefcase, wallet/purse, or any carried-in items to security personnel.
- Employee/Visitor instructed to remove all items from pockets and turn pockets inside out.
- Employee/Visitor instructed to proceed through walk-thru metal detector.
- Employee/Visitor instructed to display the bottom of each foot one at a time to staff.
- Application of a hand-held metal detector, when required.
- Personal items removed from pockets and person is searched by staff.
- Pat-down search conducted by same gender staff.
- Personal items approved are returned and search process completed.

Representatives of the project team had the opportunity to go through the search process on multiple occasions, as well as directly observe the employee search process and remotely review the search process through a video monitor located in the assistant warden's office at the High Security Unit. The project team noted that the on-going employee search practice was consistent with established search policies.

There were occasions observed when personnel assigned to the main entrance appeared to be rushing through the process. As a result, specific portions of the search procedure became vulnerable to "short-cuts." Based on observations, employees and visitors were consistently required to remove personal property items, clear the walk-thru metal detector, and were subject to pat-down searches. However, occasional breakdowns in the search process were observed.

For example, the proper completion of the sign-in/out logbooks was not always confirmed, the personal property items placed in the property trays were occasionally superficially searched, clear containers were not thoroughly examined, the back pockets of the pants were not always checked, and the bottom of the feet were casually screened. It appeared that staff had a tendency to rush through the process when there were large numbers of employees/visitors waiting to be searched.

The search procedure that appeared to be most frequently vulnerable to “short-cuts” was the hands-on searching of personal property items located in the property trays. There was no x-ray or imagery scanning equipment available and, as a result, staff were required to check each personal property item while completing multiple tasks and responding to inquiries. As a result, personal property items were occasionally superficially examined and returned to the employee/visitor.

TDCJ would benefit from a review of security screening procedures in place at other high security units relative to entry, inspections and metal detector walk-thru procedures. Most of these units utilize and rely on x-ray screening or imagery equipment to assist in the screening of personal property items in order to assist in the handling and inspection of property entering the facilities.

Physical Layout

The main egress point for all staff and visitors entering and leaving the High Security Unit consists of a single hallway approximately seven feet wide. The hallway was designed to be a controlled pass-way that leads to the secure areas within the facility. The hallway was not originally designed to provide sufficient space to complete a comprehensive search and entry process.

As of November 30, 2009, the role of the main entrance hallway was modified to include the employee/visitor search and entry point. The hallway now currently contains the following: a table used to place employee/visitor personal property items, sign-in/out logbooks, a walk-thru metal detector, a hand-held metal detector, surveillance cameras and a property table designed to be used to place “sterile” personal property items.

The walk-thru metal detector was added on December 3, 2009. This one hallway is used as the main egress point for all staff and visitors entering and leaving the facility. As a result at certain times during the day, there becomes very limited space available to effectively process individuals into and out of the facility. The lack of a secure staging area to contain individuals prior to and after being searched impacts the operational integrity of process and presents a challenge that must be addressed by the administration.

The employee search process for individuals arriving at the facility is initiated immediately upon entering the building where the sign-in/out logbooks are maintained and personal property trays are available. The staging area for employees and visitors waiting to begin the search process is often outside the front door of the facility. Employees/Visitors waiting to be searched currently are required to stand outside the building until space becomes available in the hallway. As a result, congestion can be created both outside the main entrance and within the hallway during peak times as a large number of individuals are attempting to enter and leave the building at the same time. This congestion, especially during inclement weather, may lead to search procedures being comprised for the sake of reducing waiting periods.

At the same time employees entering the facility are waiting to be searched, employees and visitors leaving the facility are waiting at the opposite end of the hallway to be searched. This waiting period creates additional congestion at both ends of the same hallway. The primary concern when the congestion and back-up are created is assigned staff have a tendency to rush through the screening process, which occasionally results in a comprised search process. The physical design of the existing entry point combined with the requirement to search those exiting the unit complicates and has the potential to compromise the searches of those entering the facility.

Alternatives like exploring capital improvement options that would expand the existing space, including a secure covered staging area prior to entering the search process and a separate sterile area for visitors who have been searched, should be examined and evaluated.

Employee Exits

The same search procedure as identified above is repeated as staff and visitors leave the facility. This procedure was implemented on November 30, 2009. Upon exiting the facility, all staff and visitors are required to complete a search process similar to the one for entering the facility. Management staff reported that this practice was implemented primarily to detect contraband leaving the facility.

All assigned staff and visitors are currently required to exit the facility through the same hallway used as the main entrance. The shakedown table used to hold the “sterile” personal property of incoming employees is also used as the table for personal property exiting the facility. In addition, the same walk-thru metal detector, assigned staff and other search processing furnishings are used at the same time for both employees entering and leaving the facility. The limited space and limited number of staff available create an environment that can occasionally cause congestion, back-ups and confusion, taking away from staff’s ability to focus on searches. Based on observations, it can become very difficult for two staff to process individuals in and out of the main entrance at the same time including searching property, conducting pat-down searches and monitoring movement while maintaining the integrity of the search process.

The project team is supportive of policies that are designed to detect and discourage the trading and trafficking of contraband with offenders. The practice of searching employees and visitors upon exiting the facility is appropriate and should be continued. The frequency at which an employee search is to be conducted upon exiting the facility should be re-considered. These searches occur on a random basis or with cause. The goal is to establish an environment where staff expect to be searched but the search process is not considered automatic.

One additional way to reduce the number of staff requiring to be searched upon exiting is to eliminate the opportunity for staff to leave during their break periods. Sufficient separate space and vending services are available within the building.

Recent Security Enhancements

There are four primary security enhancements that have been made at the main entrance of the High Security Unit. These include the following:

- A new walk-thru metal detector has been installed to replace the hand-held metal detector that was previously used. The hand-held metal detector is now used to support the walk-thru metal detector when needed.
- Additional personnel are assigned to the main entrance to ensure established search policies are enforced.
- The surveillance camera system has been upgraded to include recording capability for both cameras located in the main entrance area.
- The employee search procedures have been implemented in a fashion consistent with facilities identified by the Correctional Institution Division with high contraband detection.

The current policies and procedures regarding employee and visitor searches established by TDCJ are comprehensive and well developed. The effectiveness of the search process will be dependent upon the ability to maintain consistent enforcement of these policies. Several recommendations are provided to assist in achieving consistency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Establish regular security monitoring exercises to evaluate the integrity of the employee search process.** Security monitoring exercises are developed to test the effectiveness of established procedures and the alertness of staff by simulating the condition, behavior, or emergency that the procedures were designed to prevent or control. The employee search process should be tested by administrative staff on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the process is consistent with the goals of the facility. Such tests should be documented and made available for review.
- 2. Perform routine calibration tests of both the walk-thru and hand-held metal detectors used in the employee search process.** Such tests should be documented and made available for review.
- 3. Emphasize to staff on a regular basis through posted signage, during shift briefings and in staff meetings the adverse impact taking “short-cuts” can have on public safety.**
- 4. Post the items authorized to be allowed into the facility at the double gates.**
- 5. Establish site specific post orders for staff assigned to the main entrance and review current national airport security procedures regarding proper entry, inspections and walk-thru metal detector procedures.**
- 6. Secure x-ray or imagery technology to enhance existing employee/visitor property search procedures.**
- 7. Provide additional mandatory staff to the main entrance prior to the start of every shift to enforce existing policies regarding entry into the institution.**
- 8. Modify the frequency of employee searches exiting the facility to a random level rather than a mandatory search for every employee.**
- 9. Limit the ability, where possible, of staff assigned to the facility leaving during their break period.**
- 10. Establish a secure covered staging area for staff and visitors who are waiting to be processed into the facility.**
- 11. Establish a sterile area where all personal property entering the facility has been searched and approved separate from the shakedown or staging areas.**
- 12. Ensure surveillance camera recordings of the main entrance area are reviewed by management staff and the Operations Review Sergeant on an established frequency and findings are documented and available for review.**

D: Offender Searches

Various types of searches at the Estelle Unit are authorized and communicated to staff through one of three protocols. These protocols include Administrative Directives, Security Memorandums, and Post Orders.

- Administrative Directive 3.22: “Offender Searches” identifies key terms related to offender searches and describes the required search procedures staff are to follow. The directive defines in detail pat, strip and cavity searches so correctional staff can understand the rules governing these searches as well as how and when to perform them. The directive applies to all facilities within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and is consistent with American Correctional Association Standards 4-4192, 4-4193, 4-4194 and 4-4282.
- Administrative Directive 3.50: “Administrative Segregation” directs the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to develop an Administrative Segregation plan that establishes uniform rules and regulations to guide staff in both the conditions and procedures related to a segregated offender. The plan in part details the requirement of conducting cell searches at least every 72 hours in Administrative Segregation.
- Security Memorandum 3.02: “Security Searches” details security search procedures of common, work and offender housing areas. The memorandum is authorized by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Institutions Division and follows American Correctional Association Standard 4-4192, Control of Contraband. This memorandum defines in detail when areas are to be searched and the appropriate guidelines to follow. Specific time frames are cited for administrative segregation units and for when comprehensive searches are to be conducted.
- Security Memorandum 3.01: “Comprehensive Unit Searches (Shakedowns)” establishes procedures and guidelines for conducting a semi-annual comprehensive contraband search of each unit. Details are provided identifying general procedures, staff responsibilities and the handling of contraband and property. This memorandum is authorized by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and follows American Correctional Association Standard 4-4192, Control of Contraband.
- Security Memorandum 3.03: “Contraband Processing” establishes procedures to be followed in the handling of contraband. The security memorandum is authorized by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Institutions Division and follows Administrative Directives 03.72 “Offender Property”, 14.57 “Confiscated Money”, 16.03 “Evidence Handling and Crime Scene Protection” and American Correctional Association Standard 4-4192, Control of Contraband.
- Post Orders 7.006: “Segregation Officer”, 7.007 “Solitary Officer”, 7.024 “Corridor Officer” and 7.070 “Transfer Officer” identify in detail proper search procedures to be followed. These post orders are all authorized by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Institutions Division and specifically detail when searches are to be conducted and the type of search to be conducted by post responsibility.

A review of existing policies and procedures identify when searches are to be conducted and the different types of searches that are to be conducted under normal circumstances. However, there is little to no reference made in the existing policies/procedures that address what specific procedures should be applied when adjustments from standard protocols are required. For example, the proper search or restraint protocol for offenders with a prosthesis or requiring a walker, cane, or wheelchair.

In Post Order 07.073 “Public Medical Facilities Escort Officer”, the project team found a single reference in the post order under Offender Searches that states: “Prior to leaving the unit, the offender shall be strip-searched. However, if the offender’s medical condition precludes a strip search, according to attending medical staff, a pat search shall be completed. If the offender cannot be strip-searched, the escorting officer shall communicate immediately with the shift supervisor. The warden shall be notified immediately. In no way shall staff impede the offender’s health care.”

Other than the language cited in the above post order, there is no reference in the Administrative Directive on Offender Searches or in the Security Memorandum on Security Searches that references specific procedures when normal protocol cannot be followed. For example, when an offender is in a cast/brace, prosthesis, or requires a wheelchair, cane, or walker there is no guideline provided specifying search or application of restraint procedures. Specific protocols should be developed to specifically identify approved procedures when deviations from normal search and/or restraint application procedures may be required.

Process Observations

In addition to interviewing staff, the project team toured the inmate housing units, common areas and work areas of the expansion cell block.

At the time of the project team’s physical inspection, the facility was on lockdown status and a comprehensive search was being conducted. The current search was being completed through a well coordinated effort using staff assigned to both Estelle and surrounding units. Staff reported that the previous comprehensive search of the facility had taken place approximately three weeks earlier on November 24, 2009.

The project team was impressed with the quality of the comprehensive search being conducted. Offenders were being searched in a manner consistent with established guidelines. The guidelines include: Offenders are searched prior to exiting the housing area and strip-searched upon arrival to a holding area (recreation yard). Personal property was removed from the cell and was thoroughly searched by two security staff, and the cell including the mattress and any and all cracks and crevices in the housing area were thoroughly examined.

To assist in the thoroughness of the search a hand-held metal detector, flashlight and a device called a “SeeSnake”, which has a waterproof micro-inspection camera attached to a three foot flexible cable, was used to visually inspect hard to reach areas such as inside toilets and under the cell door. Staff reported that an average search of one cell took two trained staff approximately 30 to 35 minutes to complete, which appeared appropriate for completing a thorough cell search of this size and design.

The comprehensive facility search was being conducted as required by policy (SM-03.01) and results in an extremely thorough search of offender property and their housing area. This type of search requires the facility to be locked down at least once every six months and is very staff intensive and time consuming.

One possible concern that may result when a comprehensive search has been completed is the offender's expectation based on past practices that the next comprehensive search will probably not occur in the immediate future. Unless specific contraband intelligence is presented most offenders will not be subject to a thorough cell search until the next facility-wide comprehensive search is conducted. To combat this assumption, especially at a High Security Unit, the staff need to ensure additional high quality searches are conducted on a more frequent regular basis.

The expectation that a facility-wide comprehensive search can be conducted on a more frequent basis is difficult to accomplish with the limited number of staff available. However, similar searches on a smaller scale of a comparable quality can be completed with existing staff and should be required. The periodic re-deployment of a few existing staff currently assigned to rover or utility post to fill a dedicated "Search and Contraband" post on a priority one basis (mandatory post) should be evaluated. In addition, a review of the current operating practice of completing 72-hour cell searches should be evaluated. As noted previously, the time constraints on housing unit officers have made these searches inspections rather than searches. Even an inspection is important and contributes to the overall security of the unit, but the expectation that these types of searches are going to eliminate contraband is unrealistic without the deployment of additional search teams.

Offender Searches During Movement

The current Texas Department of Criminal Justice policy and procedure regarding searches clearly identify when searches are to be completed. A number of protocols are identified as to when searches are to be performed and the type of search to be conducted when an offender is moved.

Representatives of the project team observed the ongoing practice of performing searches and the application of restraints when an offender was being transported out of the facility. Under routine conditions, staff appeared very familiar with all established escort, search and restraint procedures. Every individual being transported or having returned from a transport was searched, restrained and escorted in a manner consistent with established policies and procedures. Staff clearly demonstrated they were aware of the proper search and restraint protocols under normal conditions. There was no indication of staff awkwardly completing the process or asking procedural questions.

One area that the project team did not have an opportunity to review at the High Security Unit was the shakedown and searches of offenders working at the unit. Due to the facility being on lockdown status, no offenders were working in the High Security Unit at the time of the on-site visit. All offenders working at the unit reside in the main building of the Estelle Unit and are normally escorted over when needed.

Staff was interviewed, policies were reviewed and representatives of the project team went to the main building to observe on-going search procedures as they occurred during our review. The search procedures being conducted in the corridor at the main building were consistent with established policy. Staff and offenders were familiar with the search procedures as there was little discussion over procedural issues while shakedowns were being conducted. As a result, the project team felt confident that these procedures were being routinely applied to all searches.

Based on existing written procedures in place and the observation of ongoing practices the interdiction of contraband moving throughout the facility is dependent upon the performance of personnel assigned to the post and their consistent application of established policies. Through the intervention of effective supervision and staff's ability to refrain from taking "short-cuts", the existing policies on conducting searches under normal circumstances are appropriate.

BOSS Chair

The BOSS Chair is an electronic body scanner that contains several sensors that can detect metal items throughout the body. Representatives of the project team had the opportunity to observe the current body scanner being used on offenders involved in the transport process. The new chair was an upgraded version of the previous scanner and provides additional sensors to include, in part, examining the ears and nose. While a representative of the project team was present the chair was being used on all offenders scheduled to be transported and returned from transport.

Staff, including a lieutenant on the first shift, was trained and familiar with the operations of the new equipment. Other staff assisting in the search and escort process did not appear to be as familiar with the overall operations of the new BOSS Chair. The offenders who were placed on the chair were cooperative and were familiar with sitting on the chair but not familiar with the part of the screening process that required the offender to have each ear screened, the head tilted and the nose and mouth examined.

The availability of the body scanning device and the requirement that all offenders entering or leaving the facility be screened through the BOSS Chair is an excellent security tool when applied consistently and as directed by policy.

Routine Cell Searches

As noted previously in this report there are several policy directives which require and specify the type and scope of cell searches conducted at the Estelle Unit. Comprehensive searches are conducted of the entire facility two times per year and are designed to remove all contraband, whether major or minor, from the facility. Additional searches are conducted on a random basis consistent with the requirements of policies related to the management of high profile inmates, searches conducted for intelligence gathering purposes or in direct response to intelligence received from a variety of sources, searches conducted consistent with the TDCJ security threat group policies, and searches required by the Safe Prisons Program policies.

In addition to the above requirements, routine cell searches are required to be conducted on all administrative segregation cells at least once every 72 hours as cited in the Administrative Segregation plan and in Security Memorandum 03.02. For general population classified offenders established protocol states that each facility warden shall designate the number of cells to be searched each day. When determining the frequency of the searches the configuration of the unit and the custody of the offenders shall be considered. At the Estelle High Security Unit the frequency is at least once every 72 hours. These practices exceed what is normally found at these types of units.

Cell search logbooks that were examined reflected searches being completed on a daily basis. Records reflect that more than 90 percent of all cell searches reported under the section entitled *contraband items recovered*, "trash" was noted as the only item recovered. Other common items frequently recovered included rubber bands and pens.

Housing unit staff reported that supervisory personnel identify a set number of cells to be searched on each shift. Since there are between 64 and 68 cells in each wing and every cell is required to be searched at least once every 72 hours, an average of 22 cells in each wing are required to be searched per day. A review of daily turnout rosters (staff post assignments) reflected that there is no dedicated search team normally assigned to perform routine 72-hour cell searches and personnel assigned to the housing units generally are required to complete the required searches.

Staff assigned to the housing units were interviewed and indicated that due to the limited amount of time they have available, and the fact that they are often the only officer assigned to the unit, they are not able to dedicate a significant amount of time to complete a thorough search of each cell.

When compared to a comprehensive search that reportedly takes two officers 30 to 35 minutes to search an empty cell, the 72-hour cell is accomplishing a different goal. The 72-hour cell search requirement currently is more of a cell inspection, rather than a comprehensive cell search. The cell searches that are being conducted are what is commonly referred to as “integrity searches.” These are searches that concentrate on the status of the security hardware, cell fixtures, bars, doors, and windows. These types of searches can detect major contraband but are not of a comprehensive nature and would detect and eradicate any and all contraband in the cell. More comprehensive searches are completed by the assigned regional search teams and staff assigned to complete the other specialty searches mentioned above.

Although the 72-hour cell inspection is a positive security measure, based on current operating practice as reported by staff, the cell inspections should not be seen as a thorough cell search as required in established policy. The 72-hour cell search policy needs to be reviewed to determine whether the frequency can be adjusted, additional staff can be provided or a cell integrity search instead of a comprehensive cell search would suffice. Additional high quality and comprehensive searches should be utilized based on the type of offender currently housed at the High Security Unit. These comprehensive cell searches can occur on a random basis at least once every 30 days and supplement the other established cell searches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Establish regular security monitoring exercises to evaluate the integrity of the offender search process.** Security monitoring exercises are developed to test the effectiveness of established procedures and the alertness of staff by simulating the condition, behavior, or emergency that the procedures were designed to prevent or control. These can be completed either by on-site observation or video monitoring of the process. The offender search process should be tested and documented by institutional and regional administrative staff on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the process is consistent with the security goals of the facility.
- 2. Conduct and document monthly calibration tests on the BOSS Chair.** As a result, the facility could ensure that the security sensors were properly calibrated to detect potentially dangerous metal objects on offenders.
- 3. Increase the number of comprehensive searches conducted at the facility by designating a priority one contraband and search post where the primary focus should be on conducting comprehensive random searches on a daily basis and tracking the origin of recovered contraband.** As noted previously this increase can be achieved by the redeployment of existing staff or by assigning staff from other units within the complex or region to the facility to conduct the searches.
- 4. Clarify in policy the expectations of the cell search required to be performed by policy every 72-hours for offenders assigned to the High Security Unit.** As noted previously, the time constraints on housing unit officers have made these searches inspections rather than searches. Even an inspection is important and contributes to the overall security of the unit, but the expectation that these types of searches are going to eliminate contraband is unrealistic without the deployment of additional search teams.

5. **Specific protocols should be developed to identify the approved procedures to be used when deviations from normal search and/or restraint application procedures may be required.** For example, when an offender is in a cast/brace, prosthesis, or requires a wheelchair, cane, or walker there is no guideline provided specifying search or application of restraint procedures.

E: Transportation Issues

TDCJ Central Transportation Unit transports more inmates in a week than a lot of states move in a year. Staff is dedicated to doing a good job and has some systems in place to provide reviews of policy compliance. Staff reported as many as 2,400 offenders may be transported per day. The Central Transportation Unit is headquartered at the Byrd Unit in Huntsville and operates five satellite offices throughout the state. The unit overall reported it had an excellent record until the recent escape incident. Success breeds success but can also foster complacency. A unit's strength also can become a weakness if not evaluated, challenged and some changes made on a periodic basis. The unit believes its transport policies and unit pre-service and in-service training are adequate.

At the Estelle High Security Unit, staff reported that offender transfers occur routinely five days per week. These transfers primarily include facility-to-facility transports. On a daily basis transports are made to and from the Galveston hospital. Offenders from around the state who require treatment at the Galveston hospital and are in Administrative Segregation status are housed at the Estelle High Security Unit and transported to the Galveston High Security Unit on a daily basis. These transports are all completed by the Central Transportation Unit.

Staff reported, and transport logs confirmed, that approximately 10 to 15 offenders may be transported to and from the Estelle High Security Unit per day (Monday – Friday). It is not unusual to have approximately 20 to 25 different transports each day. The transporting of offenders in and out of the Estelle High Security Unit is part of the daily routine at the High Security Unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **All transport compliance audits and policy checks are completed in-house by transportation supervisors. TDCJ should establish a system that would require an external review, scheduled by the Operational Review Unit, to perform transport policy compliance.**
2. **The Transportation Unit provides ongoing training for transport officers all of which is completed in-house. TDCJ should review this training and implement a revision to include standardized mandatory annual training curriculum of all transportation officers provided by the department's Training Unit.**
3. **For the most part, transport officers are advised and trained in what not to do during an emergency. TDCJ should develop as part of the training curriculum different strategies outlining procedures, which might be deployed during an emergency. Example: Inmate is found to have a weapon in the back of transport vehicle, officers can, slam on the brakes, run into and over a curb, purposely run into an object, swerve the vehicle, or any attempt to disrupt or throw the inmate to the vehicle floor.**

4. **TDCJ should carefully review the Transportation Unit equipment wish list.** The last time replacement and new equipment was purchased for the Transportation Unit new officer service weapons were purchased. It is apparent there is a need for the weapons but in addition there is a need for a GPS system that tracks all transport vehicles.
5. **It is recommended that TDCJ initiate a policy change which requires a security supervisor to provide over-sight of inmate transports prior to departure from a secure facility documenting the transport vehicle is appropriate and inmates are securely restrained.**
6. **Establish regular security monitoring exercises to evaluate the effectiveness of the transport process.** Security monitoring exercises are intended to test the effectiveness of established procedures and the alertness of staff by simulating the condition, behavior, or emergency that the procedures were designed to prevent or control. The offender transport process should be tested and documented by administrative staff on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the process is consistent with the security goals of the facility.

Medical Transportation

The High Security Unit staff, in hindsight, readily admits the existence of a number of concerns, issues, and problems regarding the process for emergency medical transport. It is apparent that there is a high number of medical transports leaving this facility compared to other facilities of this nature and security level. This is a direct result of the mission of the facility. It was reported that the option to screen high security inmates via a television or computer for medical emergency issues does not provide medical staff with the best process for a proper diagnosis. The result is the high number of medical transports for the High Security Unit.

Once medical staff has identified the need to urgently move an inmate to the hospital, security staff must respond as expeditiously as possible.

Medical emergencies and emergency transport via ambulance is a normal part of facility operations. There is no policy that clearly addresses what the appropriate protocol is when a deviation from normal search and restraint applications may be required. It was unclear as to when and whether staff is authorized to search private emergency vehicles such as ambulances. It was unclear whether to use the BOSS Chair when transporting an offender as a medical emergency. There are gaps in policy and training in these critical situations.

The TDCJ Ambulance Officer post order, PO-07074 states,

Restraints, to include handcuffs, leg-irons and belly chains, shall be utilized at all times (unless medical personnel denies the use of such restraints for medical reasons) when transporting offenders by ambulance. This procedure is to be followed regardless of the offender classification.

If medical staff does order that restraints will not be used, what is the appropriate response by the officer other than to comply with the medical order? There appears to be an absence of established policy on how to handle and manage these unusual situations. The existing post order appears to be appropriate for routine transports, but TDCJ needs to review policy and determine if there is further direction and clarification that can be provided to staff through policy revision.

Once at the hospital the officers have very limited access to use hard security equipment and must rely on observation skills, training and policy compliance. Current practice requires two officers to be present when an offender is housed at a “Free World” hospital. When the offender is a level three administrative segregation offender, two officers and a supervisor are needed. This is consistent with current accepted correctional practices. Appropriate staffing levels appeared to be in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **TDCJ should initiate a review of emergency transportation procedures and protocols.**
2. **It is recommended that the department institute mandatory training for all officers involved in transportation and escort duty.** Security staff told the audit team that the majority of inmate transportation training consisted of being assigned to a transport post with an experienced officer and learning by observation and direction. Officers clearly need specific inmate transport training including all the different scenarios that occur when an offender is moved from the prison. A special curriculum should be developed and provided annually and only those officers successfully completing the training should be assigned to transport posts.
3. **A number of officers told the audit team they were not aware of a procedure or practice for searching an ambulance entering or exiting a facility for emergency medical transport.** However, TDCJ policy is clear regarding searching “all” vehicles entering or exiting the secure perimeter of a facility. Consequently, additional retraining is necessary.
4. **When security staff is replaced at the hospital, there is not a practice that requires the relieving officers to search or check the restraints of the inmate.** Anytime an officer is assuming custody of an inmate it is always best for that officer to do his own search and restraint check. If the inmate is not restrained in accordance with policy, they should request to see the medical or supervisor order allowing a deviation in policy.
5. **Review all existing post orders applicable to transporting offenders to ensure responsibilities are clearly cited that identify the correct protocol to follow when any deviation of search and/or application restraints is required.** (Nowhere in any available post order does it reference the use of the BOSS Chair or any other body orifice sensor system.)

F: Security Review Process

TDCJ has a well-defined process for conducting ongoing operational reviews of each unit’s compliance with established departmental requirements. The process is two-tiered as outlined by Administrative Directive 02.88: *Security Reviews* and Executive Directive 02.92: *Operational Review Program*.

The “Security Review” program is an operational review completed at the regional level by a team selected by the regional director and consists of a senior warden, assistant warden and major. The process is designed to objectively measure through the use of a checklist, a unit’s compliance with designated security rules, regulations, policies, and practices. The security reviews are conducted at least once every two years per a schedule issued by the Director of Administrative Review and Risk Management. The “Operational Review” program is designed to monitor compliance with policies and procedures and conducted by of an Operational Review Sergeant assigned to the unit. Department

policy requires that the operational reviews be conducted monthly of specific functional areas as established by the sergeant's inspection schedule.

To support both of these programs, TDCJ has developed a comprehensive group of checklists designed to guide the process and ensure consistency throughout the department. The checklists comprise the Operational Review Manual. The *Security Review Checklist* (updated January 2009) is comprised of 29 chapters. Among these are checklists for following critical security functions:

- Searches/Contraband Interdiction
- Count Procedures
- General Security Issues
- Key Control
- Tool Control
- Cell Block Housing
- Chemical Control and Accountability

At the Estelle Unit the Security Review process is managed by the Operational Review Sergeant who serves as the review officer for all housing units within the unit, including the High Security Expansion Unit. The Security Review process was reviewed with the Operational Review Sergeant, including the methodology that is used to complete the checklists and the actions taken in response to any deficiencies or areas of non-compliance.

The process was found to be comprehensive, consistent based on the use of the checklists, and appropriately directed at the functions and policies that place the unit at greatest risk. The process included a reporting structure for advising the management team of deficiencies as they are identified and a detailed process for the development and implementation of corrective action. An example of the process used to report and follow-up on areas of non-compliance was reviewed with the Operational Review Sergeant. The documents reviewed showed that corrective action was implemented including the development of a plan of action for making corrections and the initiation of employee disciplinary action.

In reviewing the security checklists, they were found to be thorough yet provided sufficient leeway for the reviewers to assess related functions and processes that are not specifically covered by the checklists. However, there appeared to be two areas that were not covered. One, there was no specific checklist for employee searches. The checklist of searches/contraband interdiction did not specifically address the processes to be used for employee searches. All items in the checklist address offender searches and no reference is made to the searches of non-offenders. Additionally, there was no specific checklist included in the manual for inmate transportation. The procedures to be followed for the transport of offenders either by unit staff or by the TDCJ Transportation Unit is not specifically covered in the checklists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The TDCJ Security Review Team should develop a specific security checklist for employee searches and this checklist should be included in the regular schedule of areas to be assessed by the Security Review Teams and by the Operational Review Sergeant.**

2. **The TDCJ Operational Review Team should develop a specific security checklist for the transportation function both within a unit and those movements managed by the TDCJ Transportation Unit.**

G: Field Training

Staff performance in the critical security functions is in large measure determined by the quality of pre-service and in-service training programs, including the curriculum and training approach. As a result, a key element of any assessment of the effectiveness of a unit's security systems must include a review of the training programs for the correctional officer cadre. In order to understand the composition and approach of the training program, the project team interviewed the Estelle Unit Field Training Officer (FTO) and reviewed training schedules and security training curriculum. Unfortunately, this project did not permit any observations of actual training programs or an assessment of the effectiveness of the trainers to impart the information required to become proficient in the areas covered.

The Estelle Unit FTO reported that the correctional officer training programs consist of six weeks of pre-service classroom instruction followed by a structured OJT and orientation program. The OJT program is conducted at the facility in which the officer is assigned. The OJT program consists of 24 class segments that cover a wide range of correctional, management and security topics. These include presentation by human resource staff, the warden's presentation, a comprehensive tour of the facility, explanation of the offender classification process, training on verbal intervention and diffusion techniques, orientation of offender transportation procedures and requirements, searches, emergency plans, key and tool control, and the handling of offender property, to name some.

In addition to the classroom segments, there is also a mentoring segment in which the new officer is assigned to work directly with a seasoned and experienced officer on a variety of assignments. This is intended to provide a practical orientation and training on the TDCJ directives, requirements, and duties and responsibilities of a correctional officer. The mentoring sessions also includes an assignment in the cell blocks and high security units. It was reported that this portion of the OJT normally occurs over a period of six days.

The training program is consistent with national best practices established for the length and scope of training correctional officers. The training approach is consistent with what the project team has observed in other major correctional systems throughout the United States.

One area that should be evaluated for possible enhancement is the training provided for those officers assigned to transportation posts either through the Transportation Unit or assigned to transportation or medical details at the individual units. As noted above, the OJT curriculum includes training on transportation issues with a major focus on the application of restraints and searches. Due to the risks that are present when transporting offenders outside the secure correctional setting, several states have developed mandatory training modules that all transportation staff must complete annually. These are typically eight-hour programs that focus on all aspects of the transportation function, including discussions on how to respond to specific problems that occur during the transport or off-site supervision of offenders.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. It is recommended that TDCJ expand training for all staff assigned to transportation posts, either permanently through the Transportation Unit, or temporary assignment for emergency medical transport/escort.** This program should include a review of all departmental requirements for the transportation and off-site supervision of offenders and a practical discussion of strategies to manage problems that may occur during the transport.

H: Property Control

A key element in a correctional system's effort to control contraband is the implementation and enforcement of a strong offender property control procedure. TDCJ's Administrative Directive 03.72: *Offender Property* establishes the policy and procedures for the possession, storage, control, transfer and disposition of all offender personal property. During the course of this review the application of the policy's requirements were reviewed with the Property Control Officer at the High Security Unit.

The policies and procedures in place at the Estelle High Security Unit were well-defined, based on sound correctional policy, and consistent with the security needs of the facility. The implementation and application of these policies was found to be consistent and in compliance with the requirements of AD 03.72.

I: Classification/Case Management

The MGT project staff had previously reviewed the classification and security designation policies and practices of TDCJ. As a result, the assessment team was familiar with the various security designations for both offenders and units and how these designations are applied in inmate placement decisions. The unit case management staff was interviewed in order to determine how the policies and practices were applied at the Estelle High Security Unit. The case manager interviewed was extremely knowledgeable and experienced as she had nine years of service in case management with seven of those years at the Estelle Unit.

As stated in the TDCJ Classification Plan, offender classification is a process that systematically groups offenders according to security and program needs and requirements. As in most systems, TDCJ accomplishes this task through personal interviews, medical and mental health evaluations, educational assessments, life history reviews, and examinations of information relative to criminal history background.

The purpose of the TDCJ classification process is to provide a comprehensive system that evaluates and accurately groups offenders on the basis of numerous characteristics including age, type of offense, sentence length, prior criminal record, institutional adjustment, medical and mental health care needs, educational, vocational, and work-related needs. Moreover, through the process of classification, offenders whose medical, mental health, security, safety, and other needs that require special consideration are identified and provided appropriate programs and services.

In reviewing the application of the classification process at the Estelle Unit, it was found that the unit was in compliance with the applicable procedural requirements.

Specific placement decisions at units such as Estelle and the High Security Unit follow the process as outlined in the TDCJ Classification Plan and are reviewed and approved by the State Classification Committee.

In addition, this review focused on the local application of two specific sub-tasks within the classification process. The first of these was the application of the Security Precaution Designators as specified by Administrative Directive 04.11. TDCJ, similar to other correctional systems, recognizes that certain behaviors warrant special security consideration in order to maintain the safety and security of the unit, the staff, and offenders housed at the unit. As a result, TDCJ uses the provisions of AD 04.11 to document serious offender behavioral infractions and communicates any concerns to staff to ensure offenders receive the appropriate levels of supervision. Security Precaution Designator (SPD) is a code documented in an offender's record that identifies the offender as a special management risk. The designators are used for offenders who have a history of escape (ES), taking hostages (HS), assaulting staff (SA), or defeating restraint devices (SR).

Offenders with a designator are identified to provide awareness to security supervisors and officers to use certain precautions in the management of these offenders. Our review indicated that the provisions of AD 04.11 were appropriately followed at the Estelle High Security Unit.

The second sub-task reviewed involved the preparation and distribution of the "chain list." The chain list is a notification document that is distributed to key functional areas in the unit alerting staff of the impending movement of an offender out of the unit either for transfer purposes, court, medical appointment, or other movements from the facility. This notice is necessary in order to prepare for the movement of the offender and to formally schedule the movement with staff. Notice is fairly widespread and included functional areas such as medical, dietary, classification, property control, count room, and shift commander. The chain list was treated as a non-restricted document that has wide distribution. As a result movements involving offenders, even those offenders with SPD codes, became common knowledge to many in the facility in advance of the movement occurring.

The concern with this process is that offenders become aware in advance of their movement in and out of the High Security Unit. In most cases this is not a concern. But in the instance of an individual movement of an offender with a SPD code, caution should be taken to limit the amount and type of information that is made available in advance of an external transport.

In reviewing this sub-task with the case manager, it was reported that the unit had already initiated steps to ensure that the chain list became a restricted document and distribution limited to only those who had an absolute need to know of the movement in advance. Additionally, access and distribution methods were altered to limit access to the information.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. TDCJ should review the steps initiated by the High Security Unit relative to the distribution of the chain list and apply these policy changes to all TDCJ units.**

J: Security Threat Group

The Security Threat Group Management Office (STGMO) has three security personnel assigned to the Estelle Unit who monitor Security Threat Groups and their member's activity. The STGMO personnel are considered "dual-supervised employees" who are under the supervision of both regional STG (Security Threat Group) staff and facility management staff. Intelligence information that may impact the security of the facility is reported to both regional and facility staff. Information pertaining specifically to STG intelligence is shared with the regional STGMO.

The sergeant assigned to the Estelle expansion cell block was interviewed to gain a more thorough understanding of her role. The sergeant stated there are two STG security staff assigned to the Estelle expansion cell block and a third staff member assigned to the main facility. The expansion cell block staffing compliment includes: one correctional sergeant, and one correctional officer. The correctional sergeant has extensive experience at the facility as a result of having worked at the expansion cell block since it opened in 1997.

The primary role of the staff assigned to the STGMO is to provide on-site monitoring of Security Threat Group activity, developing Security Threat Group intelligence, and communicating identified security concerns with appropriate personnel. Staff reported that most of their time is spent reviewing incoming and outgoing general correspondence and searching inmate property. On average, property from approximately 20 offenders is searched each week. The number of property searches conducted varies based on specific incidents that may occur during the week. Staff reported that at one time there were six STGMO staff assigned to the Estelle Unit and now there are three. Facility management staff reported that the current staffing levels have been consistent over the past three years.

The project team was impressed with the experience of the supervisory staff assigned to the STGMO at the Estelle expansion unit and the ongoing practice of screening general correspondence and offender property. Facility management staff reported that information obtained from the STG staff regarding security concerns was routinely shared with management staff.

K: Video Monitoring

Security Memorandum 01.14 provides for TDCJ procedures for the operation of video surveillance systems. The SM notes that use of the electronic surveillance equipment is consistent with the department's Safe Prison Program.

The existing video surveillance system at the High Security Unit is not perfect but it is adequate in its present configuration. Recent upgrades to the system expanded the system's capability to digitally record, although it is still somewhat limited compared to systems in other high security facilities.

The existing system provides comprehensive coverage of the key areas of the facility including perimeter, entrance areas, main corridors, housing units, and key support areas like medical. These areas can be monitored electronically from several remote locations including the assistant warden's office, Central Control, and the Movement Control posts (MMC1-A and MMC1-B).

The video surveillance system at the High Security Unit is especially important in assisting in monitoring activities within the housing units. In view of the existing staffing and deployment practices at the unit that often results in several housing units being staffed on a regular basis with one officer, the monitoring by the MMC1 control posts is critical to providing secondary supervision of

the units. However, the present configuration of the system does not maximize its potential to assist in this function. This is primarily due to time constraints of the officers assigned to these posts but also the lack of sufficient monitors in the MMC1 and Control Center that would permit the constant viewing of activities within the units. Presently, the system in the MMC1 only permits observation in the housing areas when the officer specifically activates viewing in a specific unit – the system does not automatically rotate among the units nor does it maintain constant viewing of the units as a whole.

Additionally, the reality of the MMC1-A and MMC1-B posts is that surveillance of the housing units by necessity becomes a secondary activity to monitoring corridor and door movement. The officers are so busy with the primary oversight of doors, authorizing movement throughout the facility, that the surveillance of the monitors assigned to the housing units becomes not only secondary but often a completely overlooked activity.

Similarly, monitoring of the employee searches at the entry point by management staff should be encouraged, if not required. Video surveillance equipment is in place to do this but the time constraints and the location of the monitors (and until recently the limitation of recording equipment and capability) limits the ability to do this on an ongoing basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Expand the capability of the monitoring in MMC1-A and MMC1-B by adding monitors specifically for the housing units.**
2. **Surveillance of the Estelle High Security Unit housing units by all control point locations should become a primary task and not relegated to a secondary task due to the configuration of the equipment and the conflicts with other required duties.** This may require a modification of the officer deployment charts for these posts.
3. **The unit's supervisory staff should specifically review recordings of the employee search tapes on a weekly basis in order to ensure that quality and thoroughness are maintained at all times.**

L: Perimeter Security

The perimeter at the Estelle expansion unit is comprised of a well-balanced combination of established policies, trained staff, advanced technology and sophisticated physical barriers. The cell block is located outside the secure perimeter of the main facility directly across from the “Back Gate” of the main building. The facility is surrounded by a secure double fence enhanced with razor ribbon, tension wire and several rolls of concertina wire. In addition, the integration of an electronic intrusion detection system on the fence directly linked to an alarm panel in Central Control creates an effective deterrent while providing real-time detection.

Inside the perimeter there are two attached buildings: one for administrative and support functions and the other for offender housing. Within the housing building there are 10 self-contained cell blocks with each housing unit providing between 64 and 68 precast concrete cells. A shower and water closet/lavatory combination unit is provided in each cell to minimize offender movement. In the administrative building there is a commissary, property storage area, office space, maintenance, food services and loading dock.

Along with the physical barriers established through the security fence, razor ribbon and concertina wire, surveillance cameras are strategically positioned around the perimeter complimented by staff assigned to three elevated pickets (perimeter watch towers).

Perimeter Pickets

The three pickets surround the expansion cell block in the following manner:

- *East Picket.* Rear of the facility in direct line of sight of the recreational yards.
- *Intake Picket.* Located outside the perimeter fence near the intake sally port.
- *West Picket.* Located near the kitchen gate outside the perimeter fence.

All three of the elevated pickets are staffed by qualified personnel 24 hours a day, seven days a week. TDCJ policy requires that security staff responsible for perimeter security functions to be trained in firearm safety and demonstrate skill competency on firing, inspecting, loading/unloading and cleaning. General TDCJ post orders have been established that identify the duties and responsibilities of officers assigned to a picket post. However, no site-specific post orders or amendments were available to identify specific post responsibilities unique to the expansion cell block. Issues such as the lack of a “Back Gate” post at the expansion cell block, use of two separate service gates and the location of the intake picket all represent site-specific concerns that may not be sufficiently addressed by the existing general post orders.

A fourth picket, the “Back Gate Picket”, is located at the main building on the opposite side of the perimeter road of the expansion cell block. The “Back Gate Picket” is used primarily to monitor vehicular and foot traffic near the main facility “Back Gate” area. Additional post responsibilities for the picket include providing support to the expansion cell block.

Staff reported there are three primary support responsibilities for the “Back Gate Picket” officer. The first includes notifying staff assigned to the expansion cell block when a delivery or waste removal vehicle approaches the kitchen gate. The second is monitoring a locked storage area used by approved personnel to secure their firearms and other restricted property prior to entering the expansion cell block, and third notifying staff assigned to Central Control of any suspicious or unusual activity near the expansion cell block. The extra support made available through the “Back Gate Picket” provides an additional opportunity to identify existing or potential breaches in perimeter security.

Roving Patrol

In addition to the perimeter picket posts, an officer is assigned to patrol the outer perimeter of the Estelle Unit by vehicle to monitor activity along the perimeter.

The roving perimeter patrol post is staffed on the 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. shift (2nd shift) seven days a week and on the 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. shift (1st shift) only when determined appropriate by the warden or designee. Inclement weather, power outage, suspicious activity, and/or miscounts are a few reasons cited that may result in the post being filled on the 1st shift.

The perimeter patrol officer is currently responsible for patrolling the entire perimeter of the Estelle Unit including the main facility, expansion cell block and additional buildings along the perimeter. However, there is no patrol post dedicated to just the expansion cell block. In view of the size of the perimeter at the expansion cell block and the availability of elevated pickets, a specific roving patrol for the expansion cell block is not warranted. The current availability of an armed mobile patrol unit to provide immediate support is a positive security component contributing to the overall strength of the existing perimeter security system.

Perimeter Points of Entry

There are three authorized points of entry into the expansion cell block:

- **Front Gate.** All visitors and assigned staff are required to enter through a secure double gate equipped with an electronic lock, intercom system, and security surveillance camera.
- **Kitchen Gate.** Vehicle access for delivery and waste removal vehicles only. Kitchen, maintenance, and commissary items are routinely delivered through this secure electronically operated gate. The West Picket, which is staffed on a 24/7 basis, is located in close proximity and in direct line of sight to the kitchen gate. Two security surveillance cameras are positioned at the kitchen gate and have recently been upgraded to include recording capability.
- **Intake Sally Port.** Transport vehicles and offenders assigned to a work detail inside the expansion cell block are provided access to the expansion cell block through the intake sally port. The intake sally port is a secure area within the perimeter equipped with an electronic double gate, security cameras and an elevated picket. Security surveillance cameras have recently been upgraded to allow activity to be recorded. Staff assigned to the intake posts explained current shakedown and access procedures in a manner consistent with established policies and were familiar with shakedown and search procedures.

The perimeter at the expansion cell block provides an effective combination of policy, manpower, technology and physical barriers to meet the security needs of the facility. The project team found each authorized point of entry to be properly secured during the inspection period and incorporated sufficient security components to meet the goals of the facility.

Documentation was provided that indicates that the facility staff conduct regular inspections and tests of the perimeter security systems. These inspections include the physical inspection of the fences, gates, anchors, end posts, taut wire sensors, and alarms. A verification of the alarm activation system at central control also is a component of this inspection protocol.

Overall, appropriate security procedures were in place and staff displayed knowledge of proper protocol. Whether this area becomes vulnerable to contraband or unauthorized entry or departure will be dependent on the personnel assigned to the posts and their consistent application of established policies, ability to refrain from taking “short-cuts” and the consistent intervention of appropriate staff supervision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Share with staff on a regular basis through posted signage, during shift briefings and in staff meetings the negative impact that taking “short-cuts” can have on public safety.**
- 2. Make readily available to all staff existing TDCJ policies in order to provide a reference to review required policy and the ability to refresh the knowledge and understanding of the requirements.**
- 3. Review existing post orders to determine whether site-specific amendments should be developed.**

V: Summary

The purpose of this engagement was to provide the executive director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice with an independent assessment of the security practices and procedures at TDCJ’s Estelle Unit in Huntsville, with special emphasis on the operation of the Estelle High Security Unit. The executive director requested that the assessment be conducted as quickly as possible in order to identify any systemic weaknesses in the security systems of the unit so as to enable the implementation of corrective action on any deficiencies in order to minimize the potential of further risk to either the safety and security of the institution and its staff or the general public as a whole.

Due to the desire of the TDCJ to obtain an immediate evaluation of the status of security systems at Estelle, this assessment was completed in a compressed time period with some inherent limitations. Despite these limitations, however, the assessment was comprehensive and enabled the project team to observe and evaluate the security systems that are most critical to maintaining security and minimizing risk. This assessment, combined with the internal reviews completed by TDCJ staff, provides the executive staff with a clear picture of the status of the security systems at the unit and outlines the areas of concern that should to be addressed in the near future.

The objectives of the assessment were well defined and included the following key elements:

- 1) Conduct a review of all operations, security procedures, standards, practices, protocols, and the level of compliance at the Estelle High Security Unit with the department’s written security procedures as they relate to the control of contraband, search for contraband, and the movement of inmates both internal and external to the unit.
- 2) The assessment included an on-site review that focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of employee/visitor shakedowns entering the facility’s security perimeter; the effectiveness of the unit’s procedures and practices as they relate to the control of contraband; and the effectiveness of the scheduled, random, and routine shakedowns of inmates and inmate cells.
- 3) The assessment also measured the overall effectiveness of the institution’s policies, procedures, and practices as they relate to searches for, and the control of, contraband within the institution.

As noted in this report, this assessment was conducted in the aftermath of a major breach in security that involved the escape of a high risk offender while on transportation status out of the institution. As such, the facility and its operation had been scrutinized and assessed by internal TDCJ staff and numerous improvements and changes in the security protocols at the facility had been implemented. These are noted in the prior sections of this report.

During the course of the security audit the project team received the full support and cooperation of everyone we came in contact within TDCJ. The executive director and his management team expressed a commitment to obtaining an independent assessment of the security systems in place at the Estelle Unit and repeatedly expressed a willingness and desire to obtain a different viewpoint on the status of security operations at the facility. Similar levels of cooperation were extended by the senior warden at the Estelle Unit and all the staff that were encountered during the course of this review. Staff made themselves available, willingly provided information and documents, and expressed a sincere desire to improve operations where necessary. The project team encountered no impediments to completing this security audit other than those associated with the time limits under the provisions of the contract to complete this review.

This report reflects our review of the policies, procedures, and protocols that were in place during December 2009, including the modifications that had been implemented from the time of the escape in late November until the time of the site visit by the assessment team. The following briefly summarizes the major observations, findings, and recommendations of the assessment team based on the conditions of the unit as we observed on December 16, 17, and 18, 2009.

A: Policies and Procedures

Overall, the written policies and procedures governing the security functions within the Estelle Unit that were reviewed in the course of this audit were well written, thorough, precise, and detailed in terms of the stated requirements and expectations of TDCJ. There were exceptions to this general assessment. Those instances are summarized in this report with suggestions on how these should be modified. The most critical of these involve the definition and expectations for cell searches and a need to clarify search procedures during medical transports.

B: Training

Our assessment found the core curriculum for both pre-service and in-service training to be consistent with national standards. We have suggested some refinements to the training curriculum and to the scope of the OJT program. The most significant recommendations relate to the expansion of training for all staff involved in the transportation of offenders whether they are assigned to the TDCJ Transportation Unit or are assigned transportation posts at a specific unit. There is a need for a specific training module for transportation officers that should be required on an annual basis.

C: Staff Deployment

This audit permitted time for an overview of the deployment strategies for correctional officer staff at the unit. A detailed staffing study was not completed. However, it was clear that staffing deployment strategies have impacted the security of the facility in terms of limiting the ability of housing unit officers to complete comprehensive cell searches as required by policy. It is recommended that this issue be addressed either by redeployment of existing staff or the creation of new posts that would focus on completing the required searches.

D: Video Monitoring

The existing video surveillance system provides comprehensive coverage of the key areas of the facility including perimeter, entrance areas, main corridors, housing units, and key support areas such as medical. These areas can be monitored electronically from several remote locations including the assistant warden's office, Central Control, and the Movement Control posts (MMC1-A and MMC1-B). Recent upgrades to the system expanded the system's capability to digitally record, although it is still somewhat limited compared to systems in other high security facilities. We have provided specific recommendations that, if implemented, would enhance the ability of staff to monitor activities within the housing units. In addition, we recommend that the capability to record on a continuous basis be expanded so that compliance with basic policy requirements can be confirmed through review of the recordings.

E: Entry Searches

The revised entry search procedures that require a complete pat-down search of all employees entering the facility are fully implemented and will, if followed consistently, have a significant impact on the control of contraband within the facility. The physical design of the existing entry point at the High Security Unit remains problematic. The entry corridor simply is too small and too narrow to accommodate both the amount of traffic that enters and exits the facility and the space needed to conduct appropriate searches. In addition, the facility needs to use a property scanner (x-ray machine or similar scanner) to properly search shoes, bags, coats, and other packages that enter the facility. These items are presently hand searched. This simply is not adequate for this type of high secure facility and does not ensure that items are properly screened.

F: Security Review Process

TDCJ has a well defined and comprehensive policy that establishes the manner in which it will internally monitor compliance with its policies and procedures. As part of this program the TDCJ Operation Review Unit has developed and issued "security checklists" to guide and ensure consistency in the review of compliance with policy requirements. However, there appear to be two areas that are not covered. One, there is no specific checklist for employee searches. The checklist of searches/contraband interdiction does not specifically address the processes to be used for employee searches. All items in the checklist address offender searches and no reference is made to the searches of non-offenders. Additionally, there is no specific checklist included in the manual for inmate transportation. The procedures to be followed for the transport of offenders either by unit staff or by the TDCJ Transportation Unit are not specifically covered in the checklists. Both of these gaps need to be corrected. We recommend that an expansion of external independent reviews of the facilities, especially higher secure facilities, be conducted periodically simply to validate the findings of the internal review process.

G: General Assessment

Overall, the project team found the security operations at the Estelle High Security Unit to be consistent with national standards and performing at a high level given the type of facility and the security level of the offender population housed within the unit. Problems and issues do exist and are detailed in this report, but none of these issues represent systemic failures of the system. The foundations for a functioning effective security system are in place.

All security systems within a correctional facility are dependent upon the consistent high performance of the staff and the management team who is directing the overall operation. There clearly had been breakdowns and failures at the High Security Unit. Staff acknowledged that on certain occasions search requirements were not being fully complied with while on other occasions short cuts were taken to get the job done. It then becomes critical that the oversight processes, including the established security review process, identify these problem areas in advance of having a negative impact on public safety. These processes, along with ongoing supervision and oversight by supervisory and management staff, are essential elements of any correctional system.

It is a given that in any correctional system, staff performance that maintains consistent compliance with established policy is the key element in ensuring the safety and security of a facility. Effective systems must be in place to ensure that staff performance is maintained at the level required to protect the public. Those systems are in place at Estelle but they must be refined and reinforced on a continuous basis.