

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/333806_prisontasers01.html

Oregon prison guards get Tasers

Civil rights activists object, fearing abuses

Last updated September 30, 2007 11:18 p.m. PT

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM, Ore. -- High-tech Tasers equipped with digital cameras are being distributed to prison guards to help control an inmate population that has reached about 13,500.

But inmates and civil rights activists say they are concerned the Tasers could be used to punish inmates, including mentally ill prisoners.

Nearly 100 corrections officers across the state are being trained on how and when to use the shock-inducing weapons, intended to help prevent injuries to both guards and inmates.

"The officers are able to quickly subdue the (inmate) versus wrestling with him for some time," said Paula Allen, Department of Corrections chief of security.

Under proposed department rules, approval for Taser use would have to come from a supervising officer in charge, along with the prison superintendent. Trained officers and commanders will make judgment calls on when to employ the weapons, Allen said.

More than 70 people, including inmates, civil rights activists and other concerned citizens, recently filed written objections in response to the proposed rule changes that govern prison use of Tasers.

"Prisons already have plenty of means to control inmates, and this is an unnecessary, deadly and expensive weapon," wrote Lauren Regan, executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center in Eugene.

Taser shocks, if administered to mentally ill convicts, would amount to cruel and unusual punishment, Regan added.

Corrections Director Max Williams defended the new Tasers, saying they will "halt violent situations."

© 1998-2008 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*