

CAGED HEAT: And A PRISONER'S Viewpoint

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In June 2013, oral arguments were heard by a panel of judges on the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals concerning a lawsuit in regard to the deaths and health complications caused by the excessive heat in Texas prisons. Texas Observer editor Dave Mann and staff ran a much needed article entitled "Caged Heat" that highlighted the grave circumstances faced by the majority of Texas prisoners, especially during the summer time.

In October of 2013, the Texas Correctional Officers Union joined plaintiffs in wrongful-death lawsuits and substantiated that the temperatures inside Texas prisons, particularly the older "red-brick" prison units, are often as high as 130 degrees. The union's spokesperson admitted they were driven to speak after learning that the state spent \$750,000 to buy new barns "to cool pigs" raised

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RAISED FOR INMATE CONSUMPTION. Whenever prison officials and elected leaders place more value and concern on the comfort of pigs, than the health and general welfare of TDCJ guards and the prison population; it speaks volumes of the fact they give less than a damn about the non-ranking guards who actually have the duties that enables the TDCJ to function; and those of us prisoners locked away inside these human ovens.

In light of the frequency and the severity of the Texas heat, it seems all parties concerned would recognize the need for Texas to follow the Arkansas Department of Corrections and others lead, by installing air conditioning in all Texas prisons - starting with the state's oldest units.

Having been assigned to a prison unit in the West Texas desert of Fort Stockton, I have first-hand knowledge of the deaths and health consequences caused

by the excessive heat in Texas. Some days it was so hot I felt like I was about to black-out and I would be nauseated. This situation is exasperated by TDCJ officials who place prison unit on complete lockdown status during the summer months, for the purpose of conducting the annual six month prison-wide searches. During these annual lockdowns, we prisoners are confined to a hot cell 24/7 without access to ice water or cold liquids to keep ourselves properly hydrated. The length of the lockdown status varies from prison to prison based on the size of the facility and the prison's population housed there. Also while on these lockdowns many prisoners are without one of the small cheap plastic fans sold in the prisons store for \$2.50. Although these cheap fans are really no match for the extreme Texas heat, having one, is by far better than having to endure 2, 3, 4 (or more) weeks on lockdown without

A fan. A common practice is to put water on the cell's floor and lay in it until it evaporates. And repeat the process over and over into the late night hours.

While politicians, prisoners, and the Attorney General's office representing the TDCJ/defendant's in court argue against installing air conditioning, here are a few suggestions that could help save lives and taxpayers dollars:

(1) TDCJ start issuing fans to every prisoner just as they issue ID badges the day you arrive to the TDCJ. The same or similar punishment could be imposed for damaging or losing the fan.

(2) Implement a rule that "specifically" designates the months of the year that ice water "must" be made available to "each wing in every" TDCJ prison unit 3x a day, instead of the "discretionary" policy in place that ice water 2x a day is

suffice.

- (3.) Implement a rule that "specifically" states that wings/dorms housing sixty-five inmates or more shall be provided ⁽¹⁾ additional 10-gallon ice coolers currently being used by the TSCJ; for every 65 prisoners beyond the initial 65 prisoners.
- (4.) Implement a rule that makes it "mandatory" that prisoners during annual lockdowns have readily available access to coolers of ice water 24/7 during the summer months.
- (5.) Implement a rule that "specifically" requires prison property room officers to issue all available confiscated fans to prisoners without a fans once the summer heat begins.
- (6.) Place at least one of the industrial fans currently used by the TSCJ on "every" tier of "every" prison wing/dorm.

Suggested sources for additional information on this subject:

- (1) International CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)

P.O. Box 2310

Washington, DC 20013

www.InternationalCure.org

cure@curenational.org

- 5.) Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals

<http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov>

- (2) Texas Observer
307 West 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

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texasobserver.org

facebook.com/texasobserver

- (3) Geits For Breakfast Blog

<http://geitsforbreakfast.blogspot.com>

- (4) Prison Legal News

prisonlegalnews.org

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