

WARDEN AT CALIFORNIA MEN'S COLONY REFUSES
TO SPEND MONEY FOR INMATES TO HAVE HEAT DURING THE WINTER

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Inmates in the California Men's Colony (CMC) East Facility, located in San Luis Obispo, California, are having problems with their ventilation. Over the course of the summer, the ventilation in the housing units operated at maximum capacity, pumping out heat full blast, even when the temperatures exceeded 90° outside. Temperatures would often get so hot in the cells that inmates would literally be on the verge of passing out. When they started covering their vents in an attempt to block out the incoming heat, they were threatened with disciplinary action, ranging from extra duty to loss of time credits. However, now that winter's arrived, most of the inmate population is now without any heat at all.

Sources in the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC), a misnomer if ever there were one (air conditioning is not available to the inmate population, only to staff offices), have informed the inmate population that the problem is with an antiquated heating system, one in which parts are no longer manufacturer for. Allegedly, it's going to cost a minimum of 90k to upgrade the system, more if it has to be completely replaced, but it's money that Warden Valenzuela doesn't want to authorize. Instead, the prison chooses to spend money on a random drug testing program, in which inmates taking prescription medication known to return false positives for controlled substances are tested for those controlled substances, after which time they're written a rules violation report and sent to a disciplinary hearing. I.e., an inmate taking morphine under the direction of a doctor might find himself tested for the presence of morphine, or an inmate taking Tylenol with codein will be tested for the presence of amphetamines.

While snow might not fall in San Luis Obispo, California, it still gets cold enough that heat isn't just a luxury, it's also a requirement. In fact, it's legally require, yet the Warden continues to ignore the pleas of the inmate population. In an attempt to seek out warmth, inmates obtained additional bedding, only to have it confiscated during what has now become a weekly laundry sweep performed by officers seeking out inmates with more than two (2) sheets or cotton blankets.

It's true that incarceration is a form of punishment, but even so, inmates are entitled to minimum standards of decency. Clearly, the CMC is failing here, and sadly, even if the Warden does decide to reverse his position and authorize the funds, it's too late to make a difference this winter.

Prison authorities can be quite vindictive when challenged, especially when they know they're wrong, which means that there's a very good chance that I'll find myself transferred once this article finds itself posted online, especially if, as I hope, people take it upon themselves to call in and complain about the cruel and unusual conditions we're suffering. However, prison is supposed to be about teaching us to change our selfish ways of thinking, and in this case, I believe that it means standing up for what's right, even if it means being punished for it.

Those with questions or comments are always free to leave a response here, or contact me directly. While I don't have direct access to the Internet, I do have a very good friend who's monitoring my e-mail account for me (shawnlperrot@hotmail.com), and he'll download, print and mail me anything sent my way. I can also be reached via snail mail at the following address:

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