

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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How Petty Can You Be?
2-Way Signal Splitter Banned

Twice a year, the 2 approved vendors for prisoner personal property issue new catalogs. Prisoners eagerly await the new catalogs hoping they will be able to buy something that wasn't in the previous catalog. There are many inconsequential items which we could be allowed to have if they were included in the catalogs.

The January 2015, Union Supply catalog had a couple of new items, one of which was a 2-way signal splitter for \$2.95. It is a simple cable splitter which was an allowed item prior to the introduction of the "approved vendor" catalogs in 2008. Since then if a prisoner still had a splitter, he could keep it. If not, there was no way to get one.

Many guys want a cable splitter so they can connect the institution cable system and a digital antenna to their TVs without having to go to the trouble of disconnecting one cable and reconnecting the other cable every time they want to change the signal input. Many guys in Stanley immediately ordered a splitter. A few weeks later, their money was refunded and notices were posted throughout the institution informing prisoners that the 2-way signal splitter was not an allowed item.

So what's the big deal? That's the point of this blog. It is completely irrelevant whether the splitter is allowed or not. Allowing it will not create a security risk; not allowing it will not greatly inconvenience anyone. It is much ado about nothing. Yet the DOC has highly paid administrators who have so little meaningful work to do that they squander immense amounts of time and resources splitting hairs over non-issues like this.

The truly amazing thing is that in Wisconsin's 21st century Department of Corrections, the ability to address absurdities like this with a straight face is the sign of a corrections official destined for rapid advancement and promotion to the upper echelons of power.