

Office of the Corrections Ombuds

Heat Monitoring Report

June 30, 2021

Site Visit Conducted By:

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This report is provided pursuant to RCW 43.06C.040. This report has been edited to protect confidential information. OCO investigations are confidential pursuant to RCW 43.06C.040 and 43.06C.060.

Brief Summary of Complaint

With the Puget Sound area experiencing record high temperatures June 26th through June 28th, The Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) began receiving multiple complaints about the high temperatures inside Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities and the steps DOC was taking to help alleviate the heat. In an effort to address these concerns, OCO conducted a site visit to the Monroe Correctional Complex (MCC) on Monday June 28th, the hottest of the three days¹. The temperature in Monroe at the time of OCO's visit peaked at 107°F.

All of the units visited by OCO were units that do not have air-conditioning. OCO staff carried with them a temperature gun to check surface temperatures in the units to provide objective data on the heat inside. This report will be broken down by the units visited followed by conclusions, recommendations, and outcomes.

Washington State Reformatory (WSR)

- OCO began the tour at WSR at 2pm. Surfaces in the entryway, which is air-conditioned by a single window unit, were recorded at 84°F.
- OCO was informed that the Program Activities Building, which is also air-conditioned, had been opened as a cooling center for the incarcerated to use if they became overheated.
- OCO visited medium custody A and B units and the airflow was very good. OCO was informed that "smoke ejectors" were on and the doors connecting the breezeway to

¹ It was not possible for OCO staff to visit every unit at MCC. The tour group was outside in the direct sun walking between units and around the units for many hours and they were no exception to succumbing to the intense heat.

the units were open. The air coming into the units through the open doors was extremely strong and could better be described as wind rather than a breeze.

- OCO tested surface temperatures throughout these units to include the common areas, inside cells, and in the shower area. All of these readings were between 83°F and 84°F.

Intensive Management Unit (IMU)

- OCO tested surface temperatures in IMU that did not include inside of cells, and the surface temperatures registered between 74°F and 78°F.
- The temperatures taken at the ceiling vents registered 84°F.
- OCO was told that DOC staff had just come through the unit taking their own temperature readings.
- OCO was curious as to why IMU temperatures were lower than other places tested at MCC and was informed that the air circulation system in IMU was probably more efficient. OCO speculates that the lack of windows and exposure to direct sunlight in IMU probably also contributed to keeping the temperature down.

Medium Security Unit (MSU)

- Surface temperatures in the hallways and cells of MSU registered between 82°F and 84°F.
- There was one box fan provided in the hallway.
- The Cells in MSU had their external windows covered and the temperature of the window coverings was also between 82°F and 84°F.
- The ice machine was almost full of ice and the ice stations were full and were being replenished by porters. One porter reported he had filled the ice station seven times already that day.
- The temperature of the fluorescent ceiling lights in the hallway registered at 92°F.

Twin Rivers Unit (TRU)

- Surface temperatures in the entryway registered between 85°F and 87°F.
- The frosted windows in the entry that were not in direct sun at the time of measuring registered a temperature of 94°F.
- The cells in TRU also had their external windows covered; however, many of the cells are exposed to direct sunlight in the afternoons and the temperature of these window coverings registered at 98°F.
- The cell windows that were not in direct sunlight at the time but were still covered, registered temperatures between 87°F and 90°F.

- OCO was informed by the population that the unit had five wall mounted fans in separate common congregational areas. OCO tested the temperature at one of these fans and it registered at 87°F.
- The air vents that were blowing air into the common areas as well as the individual cells measured a surface temperature of 95°F. Some of the population were covering their air vents, which is an infract-able action, to mitigate the effects of that air blowing into their cells.
- A portion of the ceilings in the common areas of the TRU units were constructed with relatively large glass panels. The temperature of this ceiling glass registered at 128°F.
- It was reported to OCO by some residents in TRU that over the weekend there was no air exchange running and no air coming from the vents.

Conclusions

DOC Headquarters provided OCO with a list of measures they were taking, which could vary by facility, that outlined what they were doing to help keep people cool. These included: cooling stations, shorts and T-shirts being allowed outside of the units, the wearing of shower shoes without socks, misting stations and/or sprinklers in the yards, the wearing of wet towels for cooling, covering of cell windows, and sunscreen being made available free of charge for those who wish to go outside. OCO observed all of these measures present and in use at all of the units visited.

- OCO recognizes the subjectivity involved in how people feel and react to heat. While some may feel that an internal temperature of 80°F is already too hot, others may be completely comfortable at higher temperatures.
- It is clear to OCO that TRU has the most challenges with mitigating the heat. This is due in part to the ceiling glass, but the air exchange does not seem to be very efficient at distributing cooler air as well.
- Personal fans were observed in some cells but OCO did not have the capacity to check every cell. These are small fans approximately 8 inches in diameter.
- OCO received suggestions that the incarcerated population be allowed bins of ice to put in front of these fans to help with cooling, but this was not allowed. People were restricted to only filling cups and pitchers with ice so as to preserve the supply.
- While the ice machines observed during the tour were well stocked, there was discussion with DOC staff and incarcerated people alike that this was not the case in all units and at times the ice supply would run low. OCO was informed that when this happened staff would reach out to other units and see where ice could be acquired.
- Staff also informed OCO that they could not go out into the community and purchase ice as there was none available due to the high demand everywhere.

- OCO observed misters and sprinklers running out in the yards. It was reported to OCO that as the temperatures were so high, and the hoses supplying the misters were laying in the sun, the water coming out of the misters in some locations was very hot. Some DOC staff had opted to switch out the misters for sprinklers at some of these locations.
- Overall, the mood in the units was calm. People expressed being hot but OCO did not witness anyone appearing to be in distress. The individuals in TRU were more concerned about the heat and a little more irritated by it but as this report reflects, TRU was hotter than the other units and has unique challenges to face to mitigate the heat.

Recommendations

Although this recent heat event represents an extraordinary situation, OCO believes that DOC should consider implementing the following recommendations even at temperatures below 100°F. OCO does not believe that the heat needs to reach the extremes recently experienced before accommodation is made for increased cooling measures.

- OCO would recommend that DOC find some way to cover the glass in the ceilings in TRU when the temperature is high, and the sun is strong. This could be achieved as simply as putting tarpaulins over the glass to help block the direct sunlight.
- OCO recommends that more fans be used in the common areas of the facility and that every person be supplied with a personal fan when temperatures are high.
- OCO recommends that DOC explore a way to increase the volume of ice available or a plan to increase that volume when needed, to allow individuals to access more ice more freely, and potentially allow for buckets of ice in front of personal fans.
- DOC should allow individuals to block the air vents in their cells, free of potential consequence, when the air coming into the cells is too warm².
- OCO has the understanding that the air circulation system in TRU draws 100% outside air from the roof, but smoke ejectors can be activated here as they were in WSR, to pull cooler air through doors and windows. OCO recommends that when temperatures are high, DOC utilize these smoke ejectors as often as possible, as OCO's experience of these exhaust fans was positive in WSR.
- Doc should devise a way of shading the cell windows that are subject to intense direct sunlight when the temperatures are high. This should be an outdoor solution to prevent the sun from reaching the windows rather than an internal blocking system like covering the windows with blankets.
- OCO recommends when the temperatures are high, that DOC lower the temperature of the water coming out of the showers and give the population the opportunity to take a cool shower. The incarcerated population, particularly in TRU, reported they had been

² It should be noted here that while covering the vents inside a cell is subject to infraction, OCO is not aware of any individual having been infractioned for this. However, the concern was present in the population.

asking for this to be done since the previous Friday and the temperature had only been lowered the morning of OCO's arrival.

Outcomes

Upon reviewing this report with the administration at MCC, OCO learned the following:

- MCC is exploring options for covering the glass in the ceilings in TRU which could include a reflective film.
- MCC is looking into purchasing more fans for the facility.
- MCC reports that with regard to the ice supply issue, they implemented ice water stations in addition to making ice available, to help make the ice supply last.
- For the remainder of the summer, MCC will allow some of the measures taken during the heatwave to continue such as, shorts and T-shirts being allowed outside the units.
- MCC is devising plans for back-up cooling stations in the future.
- With regard to the recommendation above about utilizing the smoke ejectors in TRU, MCC administration reported to OCO that they are being used periodically just perhaps not during the time OCO was on site.



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
P.O. Box 41100 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1110

July 9, 2021

Joanna Carns
Office of Corrections Ombuds
PO Box 43113
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Ms. Carns:

The Monroe Correctional Complex appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 'Office of the Corrections Ombuds Heat Monitoring Report,' documenting the observations made by the Ombuds site visit team during their site visit to the Monroe Correctional Complex on Monday, June 28, 2021.

The Department of Corrections takes very seriously the health and safety of the incarcerated population and staff in the Washington state correctional facilities. The department appreciates the observations and acknowledgement of the Ombuds Office as to the cooling measures, including cooling, misting and ice water stations, sprinklers, cell window coverings and free sunscreen, present and in use at all the visited Monroe units.

Further, the department appreciates the cited outcomes documented in the report. These outcomes are exploratory options and purchasing possibilities, such as covering glass ceilings with a reflective film and purchasing more fans, being actively considered by the facility to assist the incarcerated population in remaining cool.

The department values the opportunity to reply to the three recommendations not directly addressed by the cited outcomes. The following represents its considered responses:

- While the Monroe Correctional Complex did allow individuals to block the air vents in their cells, free of potential consequences, when the air coming into the cells is too warm, it did not promote the behavior or the fact that individuals would not be infracted during the extreme heat conditions. The facility will consider whether such communications should occur if such need arises in the future.
- The Monroe Correctional Complex will investigate what outdoor solutions may be available to assist with shading cell windows that are subject to direct sunlight when temperatures are high.
- When it comes to adjusting water temperatures within the showers, the Department of Corrections is bound to have water temperatures set at a certain temperature range to meet the required health, environmental and safety standards for the operation and maintenance of correctional facilities as set by the Washington

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Department of Health. Because it could not adjust the shower water temperatures, it did establish the previously cited sprinklers and misters in the outdoor recreation yards and the indoor cooling stations for individuals to utilize.

In addition to the cooling suggestions contained within the report, the facility implemented extra security checks for staff to check on individuals, specifically looking for individuals who may have been experiencing heat-related illnesses. Also, staff on shift were provided refresher training and their knowledge reinforced on associated symptoms of heat-related illness.

Finally, the facility appreciates the patience and calmness reflected by the majority of the incarcerated individuals during the uncomfortable and extreme heat faced by the facility. It also appreciates the diligence of its staff and collaborative nature of the incarcerated population and staff working together to alleviate the heat where possible. The Monroe Correctional Complex values the site visit of the Ombuds staff to the facility on such a hot day and the time taken to visit the various tiers and units. Moving forward, the facility will continue to work collaboratively with the Office of Corrections Ombuds on these matters of health, safety and welfare of those in the state's custody.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Jackson".

Eric Jackson, Superintendent
Monroe Correctional Complex
Washington Department of Corrections