

WORKING IN THE RAIN, A PUBLIC FACILITY AT RISK

A REPORT ON THE WILLITS POLICE DEPARTMENT

JUNE 21, 2010 (REVISED)

Summary

The Mendocino County Grand Jury, (GJ), visited the Willits Police Department, (WPD), on February 2, 2010. At the time of the visit there were several buckets which were half full of water located throughout the work area, and electronic equipment was covered with plastic sheeting. The stucco siding on the exterior of the building is buckling and delaminating.

The WPD is located on the first floor of the two-story *Willits Justice Center*, rented from the County. The WPD roof has leaked rainwater into the building since it was first occupied in 1988. Many attempts at repairing this roof have been made by Mendocino County General Services, (MCGS); yet the roof still leaks, and rainwater continues to intrude into the structure of the building.

The Willits branch of the Superior Court, which was located in the same building, was closed due to State budget cuts.

Methods

The GJ toured the facility including the holding cells. Personnel on site were interviewed and documents reviewed.

Background

California Penal Code §919(b) states: "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county".

Findings

1. The WPD staff consists of: one Chief, one Administrative Assistant, four Sergeants, eight Officers, one Reserve Officer, one part-time Investigator, one Community Service Officer, (who also works in the Evidence Room), four fulltime Dispatchers, and five part-time Dispatchers. There are no vacant positions.
2. The WPD is housed in the *Willits Justice Center*, a County-owned building.
3. The Willits branch of the Superior Court was recently closed due to State budget cuts.
4. Willits police officers who must appear in court, now travel to Ukiah or Fort Bragg.

5. Prior to the court closing, Willits police officers were able to work until their testimony was required.
6. The Mendocino County District Attorney's Office, (MCDAO), may call multiple officers to testify, leaving WPD short-staffed.
7. Officers' time was better utilized when subpoenaed to the Willits Superior Court.
8. Officer testimony can create overtime cost. There is a minimum of three hours pay when an off-duty officer is called to testify.
9. The initial 30-year Lease Agreement terms between the City of Willits and the County, dated May 1,1987, state:
 - 5. a. "...the annual rent is \$30,000. Such rent shall be payable in equal installments of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000), on or before February 1 and August 1..."
 - 5. c. "For the Extended Term of this Lease which follows the initial term, the Tenant shall pay the Landlord \$1 in rent on February 1..."
 - 8. b. "Landlord shall repair and maintain the structural portions of the building, both interior and exterior."
10. The value of the County-owned building diminishes every year the roof leaks.
11. The MCGS is responsible for any building repairs.
12. Repeated repairs by MCGS have **not** been successful.
13. The exterior stucco siding at several locations on the building is delaminating and is a safety hazard.
14. Buckets catching rainwater in the work areas create a safety hazard.
15. Plastic sheeting covers electronics, office equipment, and desks, reducing work productivity.
16. The ongoing moisture can be an environment for mold and dry rot which can create a health and safety hazard for employees.
17. The WPD uses a bar-code system to identify items in their evidence room.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. in accordance with the lease agreement the Mendocino County General Services Department, make all necessary repairs to the building. (Findings 9-16)
2. the Mendocino County General Services Department consults with an outside Engineer, to inspect for structural damage. (Findings 9-16)

Discussion

The *Willits Justice Center* is in need of a considerable amount of repair. Multiple attempts to repair the problems have been unsuccessful. A complete re-engineering is needed. The GJ is concerned with health and safety issues when employees work in an unsafe environment.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (All Findings; All Recommendations)

City of Willits, City Council (All Findings; All Recommendations)

City of Willits, Chief of Police (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County General Services Director (Findings 9-16; All Recommendations)

Requested Responses

CAL-OSHA (Findings 10-16; All Recommendations)