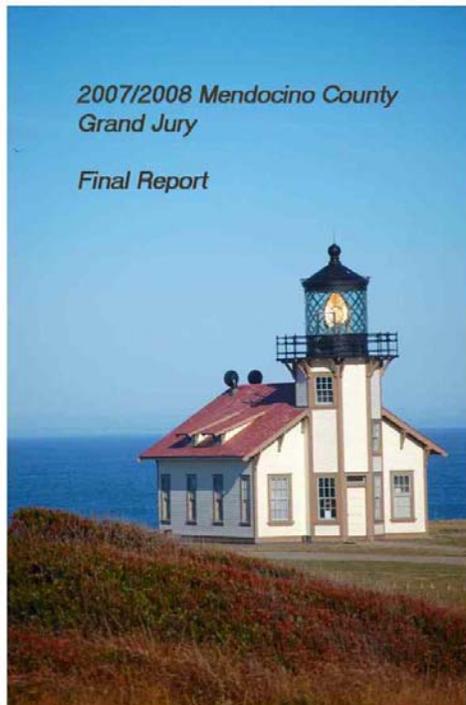


I'LL BE ABLE TO HEAR YOU PRETTY SOON: The Mendocino County  
Sheriff's Coast Sector Substation and Holding Cells in Fort Bragg

A report of the  
2007/2008 Mendocino County Grand Jury



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**I'LL BE ABLE TO HEAR YOU PRETTY SOON**  
**A report on the Mendocino County Sheriff's Coast Sector Substation and**  
**Holding Cells in Fort Bragg**

June 17, 2008

***Summary***

On February 29, 2008, the Mendocino County Grand Jury visited the Sheriff's substation in Fort Bragg. Vacant deputy positions continue to be difficult to fill due the high cost of housing, remoteness and lack of shopping and cultural activities.

For many years, the aging County microwave system, used for communication between dispatch and officers' patrol cars, has been unreliable. Patrol car radios are necessary to call for back-up for officer safety. Receiving dispatch calls while in the field is necessary for citizen safety. Due to communication dead spots on parts of the coast, and the failing microwave system, patrol car radios work intermittently or not at all. Cell phones are not a reliable option either, as there are many places on the coast where there is no cell phone reception. The new countywide microwave system will be operating soon, and will enhance citizen and officer safety by providing more reliable communication.

Last year's Grand Jury cited three problems at the substation. These have been resolved. The barbed wire atop the fence, and the security gate at the rear of the substation have been repaired to protect the impounded vehicles and hazardous materials, a detached evidence room, and the sally port (prisoner intake/outtake). The County has also the third issue by installing a security system to prevent break-ins, theft or vandalism. The security system also covers the rear of the substation.

Abuse of alcohol and other drugs is responsible for many of the dispatches.

***Methods***

The Grand Jury toured the Mendocino County Sheriff's Coast Sector Holding Facility, including the sally port, booking area, and holding cells. The Grand Jury interviewed Sheriff's Office personnel.

***Background***

California Penal Code §919(b) states that "...The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county." The 2007-2008 Mendocino County Grand Jury undertook their charge with a visit to the Mendocino County Sheriff's Coast Sector holding cells.

## ***Findings***

1. The Sheriff's substation, located in Fort Bragg, shares the building in which the Superior Court is located. The entrance has manned security surveillance including a metal detector and x-ray machine.
2. The present staff consists of one lieutenant, one sergeant, seven deputies, and one deputy trainee. One Sheriff's technical assistant manages the evidence room, does business and clerical duties, telephones, processes civil matters, concealed weapons permits, and acts as receptionist.
3. One sergeant and two deputy positions are vacant.
4. There was no detective at the time of the visit, so deputies shared detective work. Since then, one deputy has been promoted to detective.
5. Deputies work a 10-hour shift.
6. Deputies are encouraged to volunteer time to community activities. Police Activities League (PAL) recently sponsored a children's fishing tournament at MacKerricher State Park.
7. Staff shortages make it difficult to provide effective law enforcement.
8. Filling vacant officer positions is difficult due to the high cost of housing, remoteness, and lack of cultural and shopping opportunities.
9. Sheriff's deputies are on duty on the coast from 7 a.m. to 3 a.m.
10. The Sheriff's Office in Ukiah handles dispatch for the Fort Bragg substation.
11. There is an information-sharing (muster) teleconferencing call each morning at 7 a.m. among the Fort Bragg and Willits substations and the Mendocino County Sheriff's headquarters in Ukiah. The electronic muster allows officers in the three locations to see and hear each other in real time via a large screen video monitor. The system is up all the time, in case other communications are needed, such as a command staff meeting.
12. Most arrests are due directly or indirectly to abuse of alcohol or other drugs. Often crimes such as theft are for money to purchase drugs.
13. Holding cells were observed to be clean and in working order. Prisoners must be physically observed at all times when they are in a holding cell.
14. Persons who are arrested and held in Fort Bragg are usually transported to the County Jail in Ukiah within two hours. Deputies may transport prisoners two or more times a shift.
15. The south coast has one resident sergeant and one resident deputy. There is one vacant deputy position. Persons arrested on the south coast are taken directly to the County Jail in Ukiah.
16. Due to remoteness and lack of other forms of communication on the coast, communication between officers and/or their office has always been difficult. Patrol car radios work intermittently, and there is limited cell phone reception. Officer safety is compromised when deputies cannot call for back-up; citizen safety is also a concern when an officer cannot receive a call for service.
17. The aging microwave system, which provided communication only intermittently, is being replaced.

18. Emergencies requiring mutual aid may include the California Highway Patrol, the U. S. Coast Guard, local fire departments, Fort Bragg Police Department, State Park rangers and State Fish and Game officers. .
19. The evidence room was observed. Records of evidence are kept by hand.
20. Evidence must be held until a case is final.
21. Purging of evidence requires time consuming investigation into the disposition of the case.
22. An electronic fingerprinting machine is available for persons applying for certain licenses/permits, those seeking concealed weapons permits, and volunteer positions or jobs, such as those dealing with children.
23. There is now an electronic security system to prevent break-ins. The system also covers the rear of the substation.
24. The security gate to the rear of the substation has been repaired. It required a new motor and a new lock system that operates with a remote control.
25. The barbed wire atop the fencing around the perimeter of the rear of the substation, that was cited in last year's Grand Jury report, has now been repaired.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that the:

1. Mendocino County Sheriff fill the vacant positions for one sergeant and two deputies; (Finding 3)
2. Mendocino County Sheriff explore the use of Asset Forfeiture Funds to secure a bar-coding system for the evidence room; (Finding 19)
3. Mendocino County District Attorney notify the main evidence depository in Ukiah when a case reaches final disposition. (Finding 20, 21);

### ***Comments***

Purging of evidence is a tedious job requiring much investigation. With the availability of computers, the Mendocino County District Attorney's office could furnish the date of final disposition of a case to the Sheriff's main evidence depository in Ukiah. This change would reduce the time required for investigation by the evidence clerks.

The Fort Bragg Sheriff's substation provides a necessary and valuable service to coastal residents. There are great expectations that the new countywide microwave system will provide reliable communications, especially for coastal law enforcement and other coastal emergency providers.

***Required Responses***

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (Findings 1-8; Recommendation 3)

Sheriff, Mendocino County Sheriff's Office (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Director, Mendocino County General Services Agency (Findings 16, 17, 23-25)

Mendocino County District Attorney (Findings 20, 21; Recommendation 3)

## **The Grand Jury Report Process**

The role of the Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury is to oversee and shed light on local and County government. Jurors conduct oversight inquiries and investigate matters of public interest. Any individual can file a complaint with the Grand Jury using forms available online at [www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury).

A Grand Jury inquiry begins when a topic is approved by a minimum of 12 of the 19 seated Jurors. A committee then undertakes extensive research and drafts the report.

Findings are verified against documents and interview notes and are reviewed for accuracy with key individuals in the agency of interest. The draft is then reviewed by an internal Edit committee and must receive approval by the Full Panel. It is then sent to County Counsel and to the Presiding Judge for final review before public release.

## **Members of the 2007/2008 Grand Jury**

Bob Coppock  
Brad Hunter  
Kathy Johnson  
Nancy Kleiber  
Lois Lockart  
Chas Moser  
George Pacheco  
Lillian Pacini  
Carolyn Pavlovic  
Barbara Reed  
Wendy Roberts  
James Schweig  
Dennis Scoles  
Bill Stambaugh  
Sherry Stambaugh  
Finley Williams

### **Partial Year**

Thomas Clay  
Al Pierce  
Brent Rusert  
Pamela Shilling,  
Thelma Thompson

*The cover photo for this report was taken at Point Cabrillo Light Station Historic Park by Donald F. Roberts. This report was produced with the generous assistance of Tony and Maureen Eppstein. Information on Point Cabrillo State Historic Park and the Lighthouse Inn is available at [www.pointcabrillo.org](http://www.pointcabrillo.org)*