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# **BIG CHANGES NEEDED or GET A WHIFF OF THIS**

## **A Report on the Mendocino County Sheriff's Evidence Facility**

May 13, 2009

### ***Summary***

The Grand Jury visited the evidence facility located in Ukiah that serves the Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, California Highway Patrol and federal agencies. We found that numerous improvements are needed to the systems that provide ventilation, fire suppression, back-up power, refrigeration and evidence storage. We noticed an abundance of evidence from closed cases that is awaiting proper disposal.

### ***Background***

California Penal Code § 925 states *The Grand Jury shall investigate and report on the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, or functions of the county...* On November 13, 2008, the Grand Jury undertook this charge and toured the multi-agency evidence room in Ukiah.

### ***Methods***

The Grand Jury toured the facility and interviewed personnel on site.

### ***Findings***

1. The Mendocino County evidence facility is located in Ukiah and serves the Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, California Highway Patrol and federal agencies.
2. Ventilation of the facility is inadequate to prevent strong pervasive odors, including those from stored marijuana and human remains.
3. There is no overhead sprinkler fire suppression system.
4. An abundance of evidence from closed cases awaits appropriate disposal.
5. Current shelving is inadequate for efficient evidence storage.
6. Evidence refrigerators are outdated. They are not energy efficient and lack adequate seals to contain odors.
7. There is no generator or secondary source for electrical back-up.
8. Evidence is recorded in a card file. Staff reported that computer files are not backed up.
9. The building is privately owned and rented to the County for \$3,000/month.

## ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that the:

1. County relocate the evidence facility or negotiate with the building owner to:
  - a. upgrade the ventilation system; (Finding 2)
  - b. install an overhead sprinkler fire suppression system. (Finding 3)
2. Sheriff's Office:
  - a. install a space saving storage system; (Finding 5)
  - b. secure energy efficient refrigeration units with hermetically sealed doors; (Finding 6)
  - c. provide a secondary source of power for emergencies; (Finding 7)
  - d. install back-up systems for electronic and hard copy information that would be kept at a secure off-site location; (Finding 8)
  - e. assign staff, on a part-time basis, to assist with disposal of released evidence. (Finding 4)

## ***Discussion***

Jurors found the two staff members to be helpful, cooperative and informative. The facility appeared to be understaffed for the scope of work and volume of evidence. The facility is inadequately equipped to ensure a healthy environment for staff, efficient evidence storage and optimal back-up of critical information.

The Grand Jury questions whether it would be the best use of public funds to make the needed capital improvements to a privately owned building rather than relocating to an alternative leased facility or constructing one that is designed for the purpose and meets *green* building standards.

## ***Required Responses***

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

Mendocino County Sheriff (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Chief Executive's Office (All Findings; All Recommendations)

# **NEAT, CLEAN AND ORGANIZED**

## **A Report on the Fort Bragg Police Department**

May 13, 2009

### ***Summary***

The 2008-09 Grand Jury visited the Fort Bragg Police Department (FBPD) and found the department fully-staffed and well-managed.

### ***Methods***

The Grand Jury viewed the vehicles and toured the facility, including the evidence room, the holding cell, and all other areas. Jurors interviewed officers and staff.

### ***Background***

Under California Penal Code § 925a, the Grand Jury has a general authority to review city affairs. The 2008-09 Grand Jury undertook this charge in visiting the Fort Bragg Police Department.

### ***Findings***

1. The department has 24 approved positions. Current employees consist of the Chief, one lieutenant, three sergeants, twelve officers (nine men and three women), two community service officers and four support staff. This constitutes a full staff. One community service officer position is frozen due to budget restrictions.
2. There is one bilingual officer who receives a pay incentive for his language skills.
3. One school resource officer (SRO) gives lectures and staff training at all Fort Bragg schools concerning safety issues and avoidance of drugs and gang involvement.
4. All new hires are subject to an 18-month probationary period.
5. The department does not have a K-9 unit due to budget constraints.
6. There is no mandatory counseling for officers who have experienced a traumatic event unless job performance is affected.
7. The department does not publish an annual report.
8. The policy and procedure manual is currently being updated.
9. Some officers complete "Train the Trainer" taser school and then provide in-house training to the others.
10. A police cadet program is being developed for youth ages 16 to 20.
11. There is a citizen ride-a-long program.
12. The County Sheriff's Office handles all dispatching for FBPD.

13. Due to the lack of an animal control officer in Fort Bragg, increased officer time is required to handle animal issues.
14. FBPD patrol cars do not have on-board computers or cameras.
15. The holding cell is in compliance with Titles 15 and 24 of the California Code of Regulations which set minimum standards for local detention facilities and are enforced by the Corrections Standards Authority of the State Department of Corrections.
16. Each officer is assigned a patrol car and takes the car home at night with the exception of one officer who lives out of the area.
17. Each officer is assigned to keep their car clean. The City of Fort Bragg Public Works Department performs regular vehicle maintenance.
18. State funding for forensics and bookings is scheduled to end this year.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that Fort Bragg Police Department:

1. assign a bilingual officer to each shift. (Finding 2)
2. continue to provide training to all SROs prior to assignment. (Finding 3)
3. pursue funding for a K-9 unit. (Finding 5)
4. mandate and provide counseling whenever an officer experiences a job-related traumatic event. (Finding 6)
5. continue to seek funding for the forensics and bookings programs. (Finding 18)
6. pursue funding for the purchase of onboard computers and cameras for the patrol cars. (Finding 14)

### ***Discussion***

The Fort Bragg Police Department facility and grounds were very clean, neat and well-organized. There was complete cooperation and the Grand Jury was welcomed to look at everything.

### ***Required Responses***

Fort Bragg Chief of Police (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Fort Bragg City Council (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Fort Bragg City Manager (All Findings; All Recommendations)