



FIRE SAFETY SURVEY REPORT
JULIA TUTWILER PRISON FOR WOMEN
WETUMPKA, ALABAMA

FOR
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION
SPECIAL LITIGATION SECTION

September 1, 1994

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INTRODUCTION

A survey was made of the Tutwiler Prison for Women on Tuesday, August 9, 1994 by Mr. Wayne G. Carson, P. E. This survey was requested by Mr. Christopher Cheng of the U. S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. The survey was made to assess the fire safety conditions in this facility. The following summarizes the fire and life safety of the Tutwiler Prison on August 9, 1994.

This report is not a complete listing of all conditions. Rather, the report is a summary of key observations noted and documentation provided by the Prison during the survey.

A new kitchen and dining hall is being planned for this facility. This addition would be a separate building and will be connected to the existing building by a covered walkway. When this new kitchen/dining building is completed, the existing dining/kitchen area will be converted to a dormitory.

The NFPA Life Safety Code - 1991 (LSC) and the Standard Building Code - 1991 (SBC) are used as general reference for fire safety issues. Specific code references are noted.



Wayne G. Carson, P.E.

GENERAL BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The building consists of a series of one story building as follows:

Main Prison:

The main building was constructed in 1940-41 and consists of masonry walls with masonry ceiling. The roof is standing seam metal on wood deck on concrete plank on steel frame. Interior finish is primarily painted masonry.

EMC:

Two separate metal frame buildings with insulated metal panel walls and roof. Interior finish is painted metal, gypsum board and masonry.

Sewing Building:

Metal frame building with insulated metal panel walls and roof. Interior finish is painted metal and gypsum board.

School:

Masonry with metal roof. Interior finish is painted masonry and gypsum board.

MEANS OF EGRESS

Main Prison:

Egress is via doors to the outside at grade. Exterior doors are located at the end of each wing and are locked. These doors are unlockable from inside and outside, except for one door in Dorm 9 which has a padlock (See Recommendation R-1). The exterior doors use Folger-Adams locks and are normally locked. The staff in this building carries keys for these exterior doors.

EMC:

Each of the two buildings has three exit doors. These doors are unlockable from the inside and the outside. These exit doors are normally locked except for the main entry door. The staff in these buildings carries keys for the exterior doors.

Sewing Building:

This building has three exits which are unlocked from the inside and outside. The exit doors are normally locked except for the main entry door. The staff in this building carries keys for the exterior doors.

School:

This building has three exits from the corridor plus exits from some of the shops. These exits are normally unlocked when the building is occupied.

The keys are marked by "scratched" markings on the keys. These markings would not be readily apparent at night or in the excitement of an emergency. See Recommendation R-2.

There is not a consolidated set of emergency keys. There are many extra keys kept in the communications room and others in the superintendent's office. It would take some time for an officer to locate a specific key for an individual exit door. See Recommendation R-3.

There are no "dead-end" corridors and the common path of travel is well below the 20 ft. permitted by the LSC (15-2.5.2) or SBC (1125.2.5.4). Travel distance is also well below the 150 ft. permitted by the LSC (15-2.6.1) or the 100 ft. permitted by the SBC (1125.2.6).

Emergency lighting is provided by an emergency generator. This diesel generator is automatic start upon loss of power and feeds selected light fixtures throughout the prison. The generator is reportedly run tested three times per week. A quick review of the test records confirmed this frequency. The generator is not reportedly tested under load, although it was reported that frequent power outages due to storms do test the system during summer months. See Recommendation R-4.

Internally illuminated exit signs are provided throughout the facility.

Egress plans are posted.

Fire drills are reportedly held approximately once each month on the first and second shifts. In questioning several inmates it appears that the frequency of drills has increased in the last few months. Records of drills are kept in the daily log and the monthly incident reports. See Recommendation R-5.

FIRE PROTECTION

There are no fire sprinklers nor standpipe systems provided.

There is a Gamewell fire alarm system provided for the main prison building. This system has the following alarm initiating devices:

- Telephone handsets in locked cabinets located at various points. Activation of these handsets will sound the evacuation alarms.
- Heat detectors are reportedly installed in the attic.

There are no area smoke detectors provided in the cell areas. See Recommendation R-6.

Portable fire extinguishers are provided throughout. In questioning staff on the training in the use of portable fire extinguishers it was learned that there is not an on-going program. See Recommendation R-7.

FUEL CONTROL

Fuels are limited. Mattresses are purchased from state prison industries and are flame retardant boric acid treated cotton. Some inmates are provided with "egg crate" decubitus foam pads. These pads are not fire retardant and will burn readily.

FIRE SAFETY PLANS

There is a written fire safety plan. Drills are reportedly conducted on the first and second shifts, but none on the third shift.

The state fire marshal did recently make an inspection. There are reportedly no inspections or preplanning conducted by the local fire department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R-1 The egress door in Dorm 9 to outside through the storage area should be reconfigured so that it can be unlocked from the outside. (LSC 15-2.11.5; SBC 1125.9.3)
- R-2 Mark all keys required for emergency evacuation so they are readily identifiable by sight and touch. (LSC 31-5.5)
- R-3 A consolidated set of emergency keys for evacuation should be provided. Each key should be readily identifiable by sight and touch. These keys should readily available to staff at all times.
- R-4 Test the emergency generator under load at least monthly in accordance with NFPA 110.
- R-5 Conduct drills once each quarter on each shift. Drills should be varied in times, routes and conditions so that the staff is well practiced in dealing with a variety of situations. (LSC 31-5.1.3)
- R-6 Provide smoke detectors in all inmate housing areas and areas not separated from inmate housing by 1 hour fire rated construction. (LSC 15-3.4.4; SBC 409.2.12)

R-7 Staff should be regularly trained in the use of portable fire extinguishers to handle small fires. This training should include an initial hands-on training and at least annual refresher training. (LSC 31-5.1.4)