

# **Internal Audit Risk Assessment Program Sheriff – Corrections Bureau Risk Identification**

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**Whatcom County Auditor's Office**

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# About the Risk Assessment

## Objective

The objective of the risk assessment is to identify significant areas of risk to County operations within the Sheriff's Office – Corrections Bureau for later comparison to other County-wide risks for the purpose of considering where to best use audit resources.

## Scope

The assessment will cover all major operations of the Sheriff's Office – Corrections Bureau and significant inherent risks to those operations.

This should not be construed to be a comprehensive assessment since Internal Audit Division resources are limited. This assessment does not evaluate established management controls used to mitigate these inherent risks.

## Methodology

This assessment was performed as follows:

- By meeting with management in a series of short interviews to discuss the operations and perceived inherent risks.
- Reviewing the Sheriff's Office – Corrections Bureau's website.
- Reviewing applicable sections of the Whatcom County 2009-2010 Final Budget report.

# Results of the Assessment

## Offender Processing

When offenders arrive at the Correction's facility they are initially screened for medical health issues, checked to ensure legal charges are on record and a demographics record is made. A photo and finger prints are taken. A basic initial classification, called a gross classification, is performed to determine initial placement within the Correction's facility.

The Bureau is responsible to catalog and securely maintain inmate property which the inmates are not permitted to keep in the housing units. Items are cataloged and secured in a secure storage area and money is placed in an inmate trust account.

The Bureau is responsible to ensure the offender is released appropriately and receives their belongings.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Medical issues may not be known at the time of booking
- Is this the correct person - false identification of offender
- Offender may attempt escape
- Offender may attempt to cause bodily damage to someone else or themselves
- Inmate property or funds may get lost or misplaced
- Input errors may occur

## Housing

The Corrections Bureau has two primary facilities. The main facility is used to house medium and high security prisoners while the alternative facility is used for minimum security prisoners.

The main facility was completed in 1984. Based on discussions with leadership in the Sheriff's Office and the Executive's Office, the facilities were altered by a previous administration and the building has lost a certain amount of structural integrity. In addition, a previous administration purchased low quality, discontinued products for certain significant control mechanisms, when the jail was originally constructed.

The alternative facility was completed in 2006. According to the Chief of Corrections, these facilities are reported to be in fairly, good condition, although there have been construction issues which have had to be corrected.

The Corrections Bureau has interlocal agreements with all of the local municipalities and both the Nooksack and Lummi Indian tribes, as well as federal agencies such as Homeland Security. The Washington State Patrol and the State Department of Corrections also use the County facilities.

Overall capacity is impacted by the population mix, making population management a vital management processes to ensure the health and safety of all involved. This involves not only segregation based on gender but also segregation based on the various offender types that may require specific segregation or extra monitoring. This

includes, but is not limited to medical issues, mental health, development disabilities, age, type of offense, sophistication of offender, and gang affiliation.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Insufficient bed capacity
- Insufficient capacity for segregation of certain high security inmates
- Deteriorating facilities
- Insufficient capacity to effectively monitor inmates
- Inadequate levels of staffing

## **Transportation**

The Corrections Bureau transports inmates around the County as well as between counties from Whatcom County down through King County. The Bureau owns and operates several vehicles including a bus and a semi truck for long-hauls, and vans for work crews, work release transport, medical transport and other transportation purposes.

The Bureau has interlocal agreements with Skagit, Snohomish, San Juan, Island, and King counties to provide transportation of prisoners between these counties.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Prisoners may attempt to escape
- Vehicular accidents/injuries
- Coordination inefficiencies between other agencies

## **Inmate Healthcare**

The Corrections Bureau manages healthcare services by means of various outsourced providers, including medical, dental, vision and mental health case management. On-site and offsite services are provided.

The Bureau is an associate member of the National Commission on Correctional Health Care. This organization operates an accreditation program requiring organizations to submit an annual self evaluation survey and to be audited every three years. This program establishes standards and independently evaluates compliance with those standards.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Limited community resources willing or capable to work with inmate populations
- Private caregivers may not be adequately prepared to handle inmates
- Dedicated physical onsite space limitations

## **Food and Laundry**

Meals are provided by a third-party services vendor who uses on site facilities and manages prisoners who perform most of the kitchen duties. The alternative jail facility has a reheat kitchen. Meals are put together in the kitchen at the main facility and transported to the alternative facility to be heated up.

The Bureau hires an independent third-party dietician to routinely assess the menu items to ensure meals meet criteria for balanced caloric and nutritional values.

In addition, this vendor operates an onsite commissary where prisoners may purchase snacks and personal items.

The vendor also manages prisoners in the operations of the laundering facilities.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Special medical dietary needs may be difficult to provide
- Unique religious dietary requirements may be difficult to provide
- Incidents due to lack of supervision of prisoner workers

### **Inmate Services**

The Corrections Bureau provides mandated programs for inmates, which include opportunities for a basic general education diploma (GED), access to the County library system, access to religious counseling, and participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

Providing basic education can be simple for some inmates, however, others may not even have basic reading skills and many require tutoring.

The Whatcom County Library System provides basic library access to the Bureau for inmates.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Lack of funding for education
- Lack of clergy for highly individualized religions
- Lack of clergy with limited presence in the local community
- Limited community resources willing or capable to work with inmate populations
- Personal risk to volunteers and outsourced staff

### **Classifications**

Prisoners are classified for the purpose of reducing the risk of incidents that could cause an unsafe environment. Classifications are the basis for management decisions regarding such things as inmate segregations, inmate participation in a work program, work release program, or electronic monitoring.

There are two Classifications and Disciplinary Deputies, one is a permanent deputy and the other is on a three year rotation. These deputies are responsible for the Classifications program as a whole. Program Deputies involved in the minimum security work crew, work release and electronic monitoring programs, perform initial classifications for offenders wanting to be involved in these programs.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Misclassification may lead to a broad array of risks of incidents

## **Work Crews**

The Corrections Bureau contracts for general labor with other government agencies or not-for-profit organizations. Generally, there is one supervisor for up to six prisoners. They are transported using vehicles designated and outfitted for the purpose of prisoner work crews. This program allows inmates to gain basic work skills.

According to the Chief of Corrections, this program currently operates with a negative net cash flow, due in part to a steeply discounted contract directly with the County.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Prisoners may attempt to escape
- Prisoners may commit a new offense during release period
- Prisoners may be misclassified
- Injury claims (Labor and Industries)

## **Work Release**

The work release program allows certain classifications of minimum security prisoners to attend work for an external employer. These prisoners are temporarily released prior to work hours and must return within a specified time. They are charged a percentage of their wages as an administrative fee for the program.

Prisoners enrolled in this program are required to pay fees for their room and board. According to the Chief of Corrections, this program operates with a positive net cash flow.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Prisoners may commit a new offense during release period
- Prisoners may fail to return in a timely manner
- Prisoners may attempt to escape

## **Electronic Monitoring**

Under this program, certain classifications of minimum security prisoners are allowed to live outside of jail confinement while being monitored electronically. The offenders must be within the proximity of their home during certain hours.

Prisoners enrolled in this program are required to pay fees for the electronic monitoring. According to the Chief of Corrections, this program operates with a positive net cash flow.

Areas of risks to this program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Prisoners may commit a new offense during release period
- Prisoners may fail to return in a timely manner
- Prisoners may attempt to escape
- Monitoring equipment may be lost or destroyed

## **Special Programs**

The Corrections Bureau conducts special programs such as drug testing, jail tours, and jail access/background checks.

Corrections Bureau staff observes the collection of samples for drug testing. Samples are sent to a vendor for drug testing.

Jail tours are used as a public information tool as well as a preventative mechanism. Some tours are mandated by the court while others may involve a high school class or a university class.

Background checks are performed on anyone who will be working in the Corrections facilities. These background checks are performed in-house.

Areas of risks to these programs may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Possible errors in drug testing results
- Possible hostage situation during a jail tour
- Delays in background checks causing other work to be delayed
- Background checks may inaccurately accept or reject an individual

## **ABOUT WHATCOM COUNTY'S INTERNAL AUDIT SYSTEM**

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The internal audit system was established on July 1, 1994 by a 1993 Whatcom County charter amendment. The county auditor has the authority and responsibility for the management of the internal audit system. As an independently elected official, the county auditor has the organizational status and objectivity necessary to maintain the independence required to schedule, perform, and report audit activities.

The key purpose of the internal audit function is to promote accountability. As an independent appraisal function, internal auditing provides public officials, legislators and citizens with information regarding the operation and management of county government.

The internal audit system is chartered to perform operational and financial audits of all programs, services and accounts that come under the budget authority of the county. Our audits are designed to comply with applicable professional standards. Results of the audits are published in individual audit reports, and are made available to the public.

Comments or questions about the internal audit system can be directed to:

Shirley Forslof, County Auditor	(360) 676-6740 ext. 56744
Debbie Adelstein, Chief Deputy Auditor	(360) 676-6740 ext. 50065
Fred Williams, Internal Auditor	(360) 676-6740 ext. 50049

Copies of audit reports may be obtained in the following manner:

Request a copy in writing to:  
Whatcom County Auditor's Office  
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 103, Bellingham, WA 98225

Request a copy by telephone (360) 676-6740, or fax (360) 738-4556.