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New DOC statement on used books

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Mon, Sep 30, 2024 at 5:06 PM

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All,

I want to make a correction. In my original message, I said a total of 159 incidents involved drugs on paper from 2019-Sept. 18, 2024. That is incorrect math on my part. It should be 214 out of the total 881 drug related contraband incidents involved drugs on paper. I have corrected this below as well.

I am anticipating that we will have the redacted incident report related to the third incident with Wisconsin Books to Prisoners ready to release tomorrow.

Thanks,
Beth

Beth Hardtke

Director of Communications

Office of Public Affairs | Office of the Secretary

Wisconsin Department of Corrections

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From: Williams Hardtke, Beth - DOC

Sent: Monday, September 30, 2024 12:32 PM

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Subject: New DOC statement on used books

Hi all,

As you have all inquired about the how paper and books can be used to smuggle drugs into DOC facilities and the reasons behind DOC's decision to prohibit individuals and organizations from sending in used books, I wanted to share the statement below this note as well as the attached documents and photos with you. Attached for your reference are DOC's press release on our switch to scanning mail, a release on new entrance procedures, the new legal mail policy and the correspondence between DOC and Wisconsin Books to Prisoners. In addition, you'll find incident reports on two of three occasions when books purporting to be from Wisconsin Books to Prisoners tested positive for drugs. I will send the third report when redactions are complete. You will also see photographs of the libraries at two of our institutions – Racine Correctional and Green Bay Correctional Institution – to show you that books are indeed available in our facilities.

Thanks,
Beth

Beth Hardtke

Director of Communications

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The Department of Corrections (DOC) fully supports the educational goals and aspirations of persons in our care and believes in the power of reading to change lives and aid in rehabilitation.

In addition to supporting this important goal, DOC's primary responsibility is to keep those in our care, our staff, and our communities safe. Drugs smuggled into DOC facilities pose a clear risk to the lives and health of those in our institutions.

Our current policy balances the interest in promoting reading and education with the need to prevent drugs from entering our prisons. We strike that balance by allowing new books to be shipped to persons in our care, but prohibiting the shipment of used books.

Unfortunately, in recent years individuals have repeatedly used paper, including letters and books, as a way to try to smuggle drugs into DOC institutions. As described in more detail below, from 2019 to Sept. 18, 2024, there were 214 incidents of drugs being found on paper including in books and letters shipped to DOC facilities. This includes incidents of drugs allegedly being included with books shipped by Wisconsin Books to Prisoners in addition to incidents involving other trusted vendors.

Over the last several years, DOC has had to take additional, important steps to ensure the safety of our institutions, including addressing drugs entering our facilities via paper from personal letters, legal mail, and books, among other materials. These steps include currently prohibiting Wisconsin Books to Prisoners from sending used books directly to individuals in our care.

To be clear, Wisconsin Books to Prisoners is not banned from sending books to our facilities. The organization and all others are prohibited from sending used books into our facilities.

Just like anyone else, Wisconsin Books to Prisoners is allowed to purchase new books for persons in our care shipped directly from the vendor with a receipt.

DOC has long prohibited used books from the general public and most organizations from entering our facilities to prevent contraband from entering. DOC had previously made an exception for Wisconsin Books to Prisoners due to the organization being based in Wisconsin with leadership who were responsive and willing to work with DOC. Individual wardens and librarians also had discretion to accept used books from certain trusted sources for donation to the institution libraries.

In January, DOC announced that it could no longer accept used books from anyone – including Wisconsin Books to Prisoners -- and that policy is now being enforced when it comes to library donations as well books sent to persons in our care.

DOC is continuing the conversation with Wisconsin Books to Prisoners in the hopes we can come to an agreement to help fulfill the reading requests of those in our care and do so safely.

The department's top priority in implementing these policies remains ensuring the health and safety of persons in our care and our staff.

Correctional agencies across the country have been working to stop drugs, and even other harmful intoxicants such as wasp killer and embalming fluid, from entering facilities through paper. The Federal Bureau of Prisons and a number of states, including Wisconsin, have had to move to scanning personal mail in order to reduce

the amount of drugs coming in on paper.

In August, a federal prison employee in California died after opening a letter purporting to be legal mail that was laced with fentanyl.

<https://apnews.com/article/federal-prison-fentanyl-death-3ef8db9154600ded9182f2195c37b710>

I have previously shared that recently in Stillwater, Minnesota, nine corrections staffers were hospitalized after being exposed to a substance concealed inside a milk carton.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/stillwater-prison-lockdown-staff-hospitalized/>

DOC is sharing this information in an effort to educate the public about the real dangers of illicit substances being smuggled into our institutions that can cause harm not only to the persons in our care but staff and community members as well.

Each Wisconsin correctional institution has its own library. I'm attaching a photo of the library at Racine Correctional Institution, which contains more than 11,000 books. I'm also attaching photos of the library at Green Bay Correctional Institution where they have run out of shelf space and have to keep some books in storage.

The department also partners with a variety of technical colleges, universities, and other educational programs that bring in textbooks and other reading materials for classes.

DOC is also in the midst of rolling out new electronic tablets for free to persons in our care. Those tablets allow access to a number of e-books for free as well.

This is in addition to the books that come into our institutions from friends and family who choose to purchase books directly from bookstores, which then send the books with receipt in for individual persons in our care.

See below some additional information we are providing for your background to attribute generally to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

As a precursory matter, please note that we are providing the below information in the interest of transparency and to provide examples illustrating the issues the department is seeking to address by implementing these policies. In some instances, for example, we have sought to err on the side of specificity in an effort to highlight the lengths to which nefarious actors are going in an attempt to get drugs or other harmful contaminants into our institutions. To this end, while we are providing more details here for the sake of transparency and understanding, we would strongly urge caution and care in citing or using specific situational details in publication, as doing so may further enable these actors or cause further operational and security concerns.

To provide the public with a better understanding of the challenges Wisconsin's DOC faces when it comes to drugs and specifically those coming in on paper and through books and other publications, DOC staff reviewed contraband incident reports that facility staff had flagged as being drug-related from 2019 through Sept. 18, 2024.

It is important to note that not all incident reports flagged as drug related turn out to actually be so. Sometimes suspicious behavior or items turn out not to be drug related or test negative. In many of these cases, drug paraphernalia is found or a person in our care is experiencing symptoms of intoxication. In some of those cases, DOC staff are not able to identify the drugs involved nor how they came into the facility. Multiple types of drugs may also be involved in one incident.

It is also possible that some drug-related incidents are not accounted for in the below numbers as they may have been recorded differently through a medical record or conduct report.

Please also note some drug-related incidents recorded through a medical record or conduct report may not be reflected in these numbers.

Most importantly, please understand that what these policies reflect is the significant difficulty corrections departments across the country, including Wisconsin, face in discerning whether senders of mail or donations that tested positive for drugs are legitimate or are impersonating legitimate officials or organizations. DOC is often unable to say whether senders of mail or donations that tested positive for drugs were impersonating or part of legitimate entities or organizations.

Bad actors may attempt to impersonate official entities or organizations, they may attempt to exploit existing processes of official entities or organizations, or some combination thereof, etc. The fact remains that, notwithstanding the process by which a

bad actor is attempting to introduce drugs or harmful contaminants into our institutions, DOC must take the necessary steps we can to ensure the safety of individuals in our care, our staff, and the broader community.

In 2019, there were 97 drug-related contraband incident reports. Four involved attempts to smuggle drugs inside personal letters. In at least seven of the 97 incidents, outside medical staff were needed to transport persons in our care to a hospital or provide care in the institution due to suspected overdose or intoxication. This does not include the number of individuals treated by DOC Health Services Unit staff.

In 2020, there were 72 drug-related contraband incident reports. Nineteen of those involved attempts to smuggle drugs in through the mail or drugs themselves coming in on paper. DOC saw an attempt to smuggle drugs in via crayon drawing this year. At least six incidents required outside medical treatment.

In 2021, there were 192 drug-related contraband incident reports. Forty-nine of those involved attempts to smuggle drugs in through personal or legal mail or drugs contained directly on paper. In five incidents, legal mail tested positive for drugs. In four cases, photos mailed to persons in our care tested positive for drugs as well as one crayon drawing.

At least 23 of those 192 incidents required outside medical help for persons in our care suspected of overdose or intoxication.

In 2022, there were 164 drug-related contraband incident reports. Thirty-eight of those involved drugs on paper. In 10 of those incidents, it was purporting to be legal mail that tested positive for drugs. Please note that personal mail scanning began at the end of 2021. In one case, paper containing drugs was found hidden in a Bible.

By way of another illustrative example, during that same period, a DOC staff member sought medical treatment after being exposed to a substance on a piece of paper inside a glove. The individual was treated and released but was affected significantly enough to miss the next shift.

At least seven of the 164 incidents required outside medical help for persons in our care suspected of overdose or intoxication.

In 2023, there were 142 drug-related contraband incident reports. Forty-nine incidents involved drugs on paper. Of those 49, six involved legal mail, one involved drugs hidden in a calendar, one involved a publication with pages stuck together that tested positive and one involved a pad of paper allegedly sent in by a trusted vendor.

Two books were also sent in containing marijuana hidden in their spines. The bookstore involved violated their own procedures in allowing the books to be shipped.

At least eight of the 142 incident required outside medical help for persons in our care suspected of overdose.

In 2024, through Sept. 18, there have been 214 drug-related contraband incident reports. More than a quarter of these (55) involved drugs on paper.

Among those incidents this year include three separate shipments allegedly from Wisconsin Books to Prisoners where multiple items tested positive for drugs. The incident reports for the first two incidents are attached. The third shipment was tested in March at Oshkosh Correctional Institution and again multiple items tested positive. DOC will release that incident report when a redacted version is available.

Two separate shipments of calendars and greeting cards from two separate churches have also tested positive as well as donated books and workbooks for chapel services.

In at least seven cases, legal mail tested positive for drugs.

Two packages allegedly from a trusted vendor were intercepted. One contained a pad of paper soaked in intoxicants and the other a book of crossword puzzles also soaked in intoxicants.

Just this month in two separate institutions – Stanley Correctional Institution and Dodge Correctional Institution – persons in our care attempted to use library books to smuggle drugs to others inside the facility.

Of the 214 incidents recorded in 2024 through Sept. 18, outside medical personnel had to be called to transport persons

in our care to a hospital or treat them for suspected overdoses or intoxication at least 28 times. This does not count the number of individuals treated in our Health Services Units.

Just this month, two staff members had to seek treatment from hospitals after being exposed to substances in our facilities. One staff member had touched an item that tested positive for cocaine and fentanyl while another fell ill after helping to treat a person in our care who appeared to be intoxicated.

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11 attachments



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