

# Supervising solitude

*Keeping an eye on inmate suicide*



*A special reprint for Extreme CCTV*

# Supervising

## *Keeping an eye on inmate suicide*

**Reducing the high rate of prison suicides in a litigious society is placing a major burden of responsibility on prison administrators. But utilisation of infrared night vision CCTV cameras developed with a no-grip design can help to alleviate safety concerns and mitigate exposure to lawsuits**

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Suicide in US prisons occurs at a rate around nine times higher than in the general public. It is the leading cause of death in jails and ranks third behind natural causes and AIDS in federal prisons. Given these facts, authorities need to look at ways to help prevent inmate suicides and reduce their exposure to liability as evidenced in recent court cases.

The prevention of inmate suicide is now more crucial than ever in an age of constant litigation and liability. Lack of funds is no defense for suicide prevention. It was only a few years ago that the City of Zion, Illinois, was found liable and fined US\$237,204 for an officer's failure to constantly monitor a suicidal prisoner. Elsewhere, when a juvenile prisoner suffered permanent brain damage due to a suicide attempt, his lawyers successfully sued the County of Lake, Indiana for negligence. The inmate was awarded US\$600,000 in damages and the county was denied the defense that they could not have prevented the suicide because of lack of funds.

So what steps can an institution take to decrease the rate of suicides and their own liability with the limited funds available to them?

The Training Curriculum on Suicide Detection and Prevention in Jails and Lockups recommends that high risk suicidal inmates be placed under 'constant watch', and be observed on a continuous, uninterrupted basis. But parking a prison guard in front of every high-risk inmate on a 24 hours a day, seven days a week basis may not be considered a practical solution.

Establishing a reasonable standard of supervision and making the observation of a potentially suicidal inmate more frequent can decrease liability significantly. For example, at RCMP detachments in British Columbia, it is procedure to inspect holding cells every 30 minutes, even after precautionary measures are taken to prevent incarcerated inmates from hurting themselves.

Suicide-watch cells that are equipped with specifically designed safety cameras make constant surveillance possible. While it cannot be expected that a single guard be able to remotely monitor every cell in a prison, it is realistic to have that guard monitor several high-risk cells from a central location. This way, he can detect suicide attempts before or as they are happening, and summon a staff member for immediate intervention.

To optimize any chance of resuscitation, victims need to be detected as soon as possible, and certainly no longer than 15 minutes after the attempted suicide. Given the statistic that 60 per cent of victims are found more than 15 minutes after suicide attempts, the need for a better way to prevent detect and intervene suicide attempts is clear. Properly monitored day and night-vision CCTV cameras coupled with direct staff supervision can mean the difference between the life and death of an inmate.



**Two out of every three suicides occur in isolation cells and about 94 per cent of suicides are accomplished by hanging**

Another fact to consider is that two out of every three suicides occur in isolation cells. When people are alone, they are more likely to consider suicide. If the correctional institution feels that an inmate should be segregated into isolation, measures should be taken to ensure that this inmate be observed either directly or with the help of a CCTV camera that is constantly monitored. The liability of the institution after a suicide is much greater when inmates have not been adequately supervised, especially when the inmate is already considered to be high risk.

The peak period for jail suicide is between midnight and 3am. Two factors may be the cause of this higher

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rate. The first is the decrease in staffing levels. At night, when most inmates are sleeping, it is accepted practise that staff levels and supervision are typically decreased. The second reason for the increase in suicides during this time is the cover of darkness. A noisy, crowded prison on an active day does not allow the tragedy of a suicide to occur. But quiet solitude in darkness beyond midnight allows the suicidal inmate time to reflect on what he might want to do and the belief that he could achieve it without detection.

## Technology for prevention

So how might a fiscally responsible prison administrator deal with optimized exposure to legal liability during a period of maximum suicides and minimum staff levels?

Infrared night vision technology originally developed for military high-level government security might seem to be a drastic, if not expensive, solution but this technology is now in use at a commercial level in what are called Integrated Day-Night cameras or IDNs.

**When thorough and constant supervision of an inmate is required, it is vitally important that prison staff are able to monitor the entire cell, day and night**

These IDNs, which are essentially CCTV cameras with night vision capability, can assist prison administrators in several ways. First, they allow constant supervision from a remote location, allowing the staff to efficiently and effectively see and hear all high-risk cells.

Secondly, inmates can be observed in total darkness. The infrared illumination integrated into the cameras produces no detectable glow, but allows monitoring staff to see the cell as if it were broad daylight. This

Same cell, different times: (left) full day view of a 9x16ft room with lights on and (right) the same scene in complete darkness recorded using infrared option



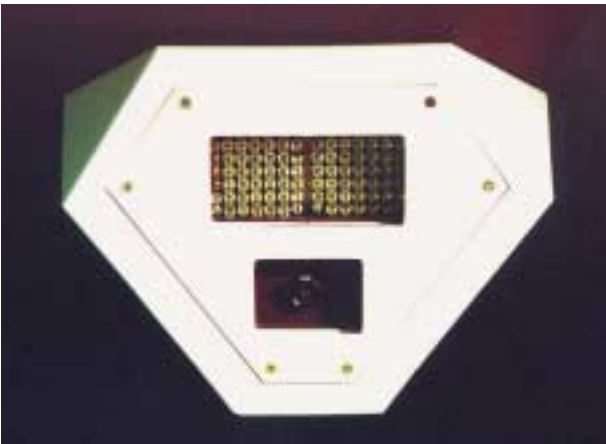
technology is beneficial to both the staff and the inmate. Prison staff are able to continue observing high-risk inmates in the dark, and the inmates can rest comfortably without the constant light that is needed to keep them safe but disturbs their sleep. High-risk inmates could be watched on a 24 hours a day, seven days a week basis with a normal daylight picture that changes to an infrared illuminated picture when the lights go out.

Supervision is not only a great way to prevent suicides, it is also a major defence when up against a litigator. Yet, many institutions still question the use of CCTV systems in prison cells. The fact is that the correctional facility has a responsibility to keep inmates safe and alive. There is legal precedence in case law to support this responsibility. Putting an inmate under constant surveillance can sometimes be the only way to ensure that they are not going to harm themselves. Suicide-watch cells equipped with specially designed cameras can make constant surveillance of high-risk inmates possible and affordable.

## CCTV solutions

Two new CCTV camera products, developed specifically for prison and hospital use, are produced by Extreme CCTV Inc. Its EX48 Conical No-Grip camera, as its name suggests, has a conical shape and a smooth no-grip surface that promotes safety in potentially dangerous locations. This feature is critically important when you consider that 94 per cent of jail suicides are accomplished by hanging, also the most common method for attempted suicides. Cells, especially those that are specifically intended for high-risk inmates, should be 'anchor free' to minimize the potential danger to the inmate.

This camera's design that does not allow anything to be attached to it works well wherever people are



EX36 Suicide Watch camera offers total surveillance of a single cell space in a single, no-grip, corner mounted design. Microphone recording is an option

inclined to inflict harm to themselves. It offers a new level in suicide prevention; there is no way an inmate can get a solid grip on it or loop anything around it because of its shape. The dome ties right into the rounded base and there are no screws showing or hardware accessible. The EX48 is also available in night vision models for integrated day-night use.

It is considered by some to be an essential specification camera for use in prisons. One prison facility specifier in British Columbia, Canada, switched from another brand of camera after being impressed with the EX48, claiming it offered "a better picture in addition to the safer design". A specifier for Ontario Police in Canada said that the design "reduces the chances of suicides by hanging", admitting the one-piece fixture allows for "a no-fuss, easy install".

When thorough and constant supervision of an inmate is required, it is vitally important that prison staff are able to monitor the entire cell, day and night. Extreme CCTV's EX36 Suicide Watch camera does just that.

This camera is able to view the entire prison cell, including all four walls and every square foot of its

floor, even in pitch black darkness – a crucial benefit to psychiatric care facilities. Its design makes it impossible for inmates to hide from the camera's view and ensures that staff members are able to see everything that is going on inside the cell in daylight and in no light. The corner mount EX36's rugged no-grip design also minimizes the possibility of inmates using it for self-inflicted harm. The company also offers an optional microphone for additional audio surveillance.

The EX36 night vision camera is now approved by authorities at the US Federal Bureau of Prisons, at Corrections Canada and at Corrections New Zealand, where 250 units were recently installed for a maximum-security prison. One medical center technician described the set-up of four cameras as "practically indestructible. Previous cameras could not take the punishment and were torn off the wall," he says. "Then we installed the Extreme CCTV cameras. Patients cannot knock them out of focus or pull them off the wall. Also, the infrared lighting provides very good pictures when the lights go out."

With inmate suicide a serious problem and one underscored by legal precedent to ensure safety, such methods of supervision are advantageous. Because of a litigious society and growing prison populations, prison administrators must constantly consider ways to promote safety and mitigate exposure to lawsuits. While identifying suicidal inmates is most important, new CCTV technology can help prevent the tragedies of suicide that occur too frequently in American prisons. ■



## See the Light. Get the Picture.™

<div style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Extreme Colors</div>  <div style="background-color: #c00000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>EX27 Quattro</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Color by day</li> <li>• Infrared (mono) by night</li> <li>• Control by photocell</li> <li>• Quattro 3-Wave models</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Extreme Illumination</div>  <div style="background-color: #c00000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>LP500 Infrared Illuminator</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even distribution of IR light</li> <li>• Long-range: 300 to 900 ft. or more</li> <li>• Unsurpassed night-viewing</li> <li>• No overexposure of foreground</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Extreme Night Vision</div>  <div style="background-color: #c00000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>EX36N Night Vision</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruggedized Corner Unit</li> <li>• 64 LED Infrared array</li> <li>• Hospital/Prison cell cameras</li> <li>• View of entire room</li> </ul>
<div style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Extreme Impact</div>  <div style="background-color: #c00000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>EX45 Vandal Resistant</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hammer-tough, weathertight</li> <li>• Compact, only 5" diameter</li> <li>• Vandal power protected</li> <li>• Varifocal auto-iris optional</li> <li>• Infrared models optional</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Extreme Environment</div>  <div style="background-color: #c00000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>EX10 Waterproof Camera</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watertight, rugged construction</li> <li>• Rated for protection from rain, snow, dust &amp; corrosive agents</li> <li>• Ideal for marine, washdown &amp; clean room installations</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">Extreme Toughness</div>  <div style="background-color: #c00000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>EX60 Explosion Protected</b></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous environments</li> <li>• Ballistic-rated</li> <li>• Class I, Div 1, Group A to G</li> <li>• Fits all major brands of cameras</li> <li>• Compact EX50 optional</li> </ul>

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