

# State inmates with Tasers. Sleeping guards. Report outlines dysfunction at the Daggett County jail before it lost its inmates over concerns of torture and misconduct.

Salt Lake Tribune

By Taylor W. Anderson

May 23, 2018

<https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2018/05/24/state-inmates-with-tasers-sleeping-guards-report-outlines-dysfunction-at-the-daggett-county-jail-before-it-lost-its-inmates-over-concerns-of-torture-and-misconduct/>

Daggett County's budget was small, propped up by the money the Utah prison system gave it to essentially rent jail space each day for about 80 state inmates. But the work of running the jail could often be boring.

Night shifts were long, at times 12 hours through the dead of night when prisoners were sleeping. So guards would routinely sleep, too, taking shifts to ensure one was on lookout while the other napped.

Once, a guard gave an inmate a Taser to scare someone, according to a newly released investigative report from the Department of Corrections.

The report details how some deputies spent their time while overseeing the oversized jail in Utah's least populous county in a remote corner of the state, before criminal behavior by several deputies and lax oversight by the sheriff cost the county its money-making jail.

Sometimes, they'd skip their rounds where they were supposed to circle the medium-sized jail counting inmates to make sure everything was in order.

When the county bought the sheriff's office a new police dog, Deputy Josh Cox used inmates to train it, the report says, and he also trained his own dog using the inmates to hold bite toys. At least one inmate was bitten.

The report provides new details of the dysfunction at the jail, one of more than a dozen built or expanded in rural parts of the state as an economic driver and space saver under the Department of Corrections' Inmate Placement Program.

Corrections withheld significant portions of the report, which The Salt Lake Tribune obtained through a public records request. The Tribune has appealed to allow the public to know more about what employees and inmates told investigators regarding the conditions inside the jail.

John Mejia, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah who is representing two former Daggett inmates who are suing the county and state, said the report appeared to confirm his clients' stories of abuse inside the jail between 2015 and 2017.

"I'm glad that it's coming out and it looks like it's a vindication of what we're alleging," Mejia said.

He also said it highlights the dangers of housing long-term inmates in county jails, which are typically created to hold inmates serving short-term sentences or before trial.

Dustin Law Porter and Steven Drollette are suing for unspecified damages and a jury trial, where more details on treatment could be released.

The portions of the report that were disclosed lay out the lax oversight by the former sheriff, Jerry Jorgensen, who resigned last year and later pleaded guilty to official misconduct, a misdemeanor.

It showed that inmates felt they needed to get chummy with Cox, who trained the dogs and apparently frequently a stun gun the Smithfield Police Department said he stole from them.

One inmate “felt like he had to get tased,” the inmate told investigators, “or he would lose his job because the guy [whose] job he took was fired because Cox did not like him.”

According to the report, one of the TVs in the control room, where guards should have been keeping an eye on inmates via a closed-circuit, instead was hooked up to cable. The setup was disconnected before state inspectors arrived, the report said.

Another employee, who also said sleeping on duty was “a common practice for everyone,” said Cox gave an inmate a stun gun from the jail’s control room to scare someone, apparently an employee.

Ultimately, it was a Cox’s use of a stolen Taser on inmates that would lead to the jail’s closure and throw the small county’s budget into disarray for over a year after the state abruptly moved to take its prisoners out of the jail and send them elsewhere.

Inmates who talked with investigators described withstanding what the report describes as an “initiation” stun-gun ritual by Cox. At times, they told investigators, they felt they needed to please Cox or risk losing their jobs at the jail or other privileges.

Loni DeLand, Cox’s defense attorney, initially dismissed the inmates’ complaints and charges against his client in court as “fun and games.” The report shows several of the guards became close with inmates, hosting barbecues if the right people were working that day.

“One of the inmates said ‘I’ve never been tased before,’” the report says. “So as a joke, Cox tased him.”

An anonymous employee told investigators Cox arranged for one of the inmates to be stunned in the testicles, though the redactions in the report don’t indicate whether that ever took place.

Another deputy tried to talk the inmate out of what would be a painful ordeal.

DeLand didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Daggett County Sheriff Erik Bailey, who replaced Jerry Jorgensen, said only that “the jail is currently closed and will remain so for the near future.”

Loss of revenue from housing prisoners for the state quickly blew a hole in the small county’s budget and led to soul-searching and a future that might not include a money-making jail.

It also led to charges against Cox, Jorgensen and three other former employees.

Cox pleaded guilty to two counts of felony aggravated assault, one felony count of transporting a weapon into a jail and a misdemeanor theft charge. He was ordered in November to serve four months in jail in a neighboring county.