

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/06/15/records-show-excessive-use-of-force-at-colorado-supermax/>

Policy Issue Resources

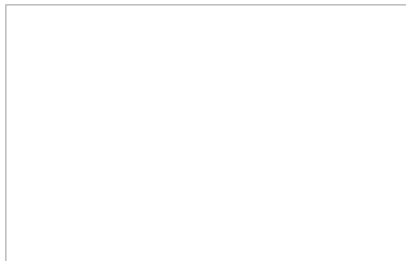
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by [Lisa Dawson](#) | June 15, 2013



Records kept by the Colorado Department of Corrections show 61 instances from March 1, 2012 to March 1 of this year of corrections officers using force on men held at the Colorado State Penitentiary (CSP), where prisoners are held in administrative segregation on lockdown for 23 hours a day. The use of force [log](#), obtained by Denver's *Westword*, documents varying levels of physical contact used in each incident, some of which required mild force, and others which prison officials deemed it necessary to use brutal control tactics, including restraint chairs and pepper spray.

[This story](#) comes from Alan Prendergast, who writes for *Westword* and has reported on Colorado prisons for years:

At Colorado's state supermax prison, inmates get into confrontations with guards over food, hygiene, privileges, a refusal to cuff up or whatever out of boredom, mental illness or plain ornerness. Some claim to be provoked by staff.

Whatever the reason, it's a contest the prisoner is going to lose every time.

Like many prisons throughout Colorado and across the nation, people with mental illness compose a large part of the population at CSP. Prendergast writes on the potential impact of solitary confinement on people with mental illness:

Although proponents of supermax prisons claim that they act as a deterrent to violence elsewhere in the corrections systems, the facilities also become repositories of problem inmates, whose failure to follow the rules tends to prolong their stay in solitary confinement and possibly exacerbate any preexisting mental problems. (As we've previously [reported](#), roughly a third of CSP inmates have been diagnosed with some form of mental illness.)

The article continues, describing the varying levels of force that were used, which should be in accordance with DOC regulations calling for an escalating spectrum of force, depending on the level of perceived threat:

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The log lists twelve instances of emergent need entry into cells, generally triggered by an inmate being unresponsive or refusing to obey rules (such as refusing to put hands through the food slot to be cuffed before staff entry); ten cell extractions, including five using pepper spray; 31 episodes of varying degree of force to subdue inmates, from soft empty hand control to hard intermediate control; four uses of the restraint chair; and four occasions when a SORT team was activated but no use of force was required.

Prendergast notes that the names of several prisoners show up more frequently in the log, including Manuel Rodriguez and JJ Alejandro, both of whom had five documented incidents.:

Two inmates kept the teams particularly busy. Rodriguez, serving 35 years on drug and weapon charges, was the subject of five call-outs, including two that ended in the restraint chair. JJ Alejandro, doing twelve-to-life out of Larimer County, racked up five emergent need entry calls. Two other inmates show up on the list three times each; one, Floyd Martinez, was involved in three use-of-force reports in one day. Martinez and Rodriguez have both been moved to other prisons since March.

The article concludes, sharing another side to the story, as maintained by people held at the facility:

[I]f the same prisoners names show up in many of the incidents, perhaps the same is true for the guards. One CSP resident told *Westword* that the same two sergeants have been involved in several of the incidents over the past six months: What they are doing is antagonizing inmates verbally when they are escorted to and from showers, and when an inmate comments and turns [his] head to respond, these [officers] are slamming them to the floor, then saying the inmate made an aggressive act/gesture so force was needed to subdue inmate

Last year we covered the case of Troy Anderson ([here](#) and [here](#)), a man held at CSP who suffers from mental illness. Anderson challenged his twelve years of solitary confinement at CSP. In an important [decision](#), a federal judge ruled that CSPs use of solitary confinement qualifies as a paradigm of inhumane treatment, ordering the prison to allow Anderson to go outdoors three hours a week.

Lisa Dawson served as an assistant editor, social media manager, and contributor at Solitary Watch. She continues to support prisoners and their family members who need help navigating re-entry. She is on Twitter [@endsolitary](#).

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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The Prison (CSP) has been under locked for about a month now, any body know whats going on?

this place is out of control, Guantanamo gets press but these are American citizens in American prison being tortured

I think that the difference here is that were it involves foreigners in relation to Guantanamo Bay, and there thus is more international attention, pressure and interest, that were it concerns American prisons it are merely Americans who are tortured.. (and I mean this CYNICALLY!)

It is a disgrace, a shocking acknowledgement that were it concerns American prisons that people inside prisons are actually tortured, are treated as non-humans!

And we all, who know, have awareness and knowledge, must stand up and protest against those practices, and hold those responsible accountable and bring them to trial!

It is shocking to realize that in a country like America people who are in the custody of the authorities are not safe, that the authorities fail in the protection of the people who have been put in their safe-guard! It makes all authorities responsible and accountable, not just the wardens, the guards! It are the Governors, the Lawmakers, the administration as well as the President who are responsible and accountable!

My opinioN!

@masteradrian exactly but theres very little interest, what the straights dont know is that it could be them I write my congress people in MI and I am all over ADX at any given time. The torture is not the explicit rape, wounding of flesh, it the tiniest underhanded day to day that tries to break these people. ADX long ago dis force feedings, there just isnt enough outcry.

@8forever: The torture that gets into the papers is the big torture, like electricity, beatings, etc. etc. What is more serious and in my opinion real torture are indeed the smaller things, the disruption of torture like letting people wait on purpose but without reason, ignoring their needs, stripping them of privileges, etc. etc. Outside it would be called harassment, when inside it is outright torture!

As to the outcry about treatment of inmates I feel that is were blogs come in, reporting on and about what happens, and people who post reactions, comments, and re-blogging that what is blogged, and tweeting about it on fi Twitter and re-tweeting!

That way people can never say they didnt know, or could not have known

Newspapers get attracted and people will start ask questions, and demanding answers!

Authorities must be forced to be take responsibility, and be held accountable.. for their actions and their lack of intervening actions!

I for one do not accept, condone or allow people being mistreated while in prison, and were I can I do my best to at least try to get those responsible to minimally know what is happening, or that action is needed!

I cant believe theres someone else that knows what I mean. My huband and I will wait sometimes a month for a letter from each other,

pure harassment. then as thank you to my complaints they will seal the letter to envelope the Feds think they can torture the families too. ADX is out-of-control. The prisoner always seems to suffer retaliation at any complaint. I appreciate your post, most blogs news etc.. simply tell the problem over and over, none calling for answers posting information. I blogged for a long time constantly post BOP addresses Govenors and I feel as lone as my husband thanx again Ill probably reply to you every time.

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