

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/07/05/voices-from-solitary-washington-cell-extraction/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | July 5, 2012

*The following was sent to Solitary Watch from an inmate in Washington. He describes a recent cell extractionthe forcible removal of a prisoner from his cellwhichhe witnessed in asolitary confinementIntensive Management Unit.He discusses the use of cell extractions in relation to the claim by corrections officials that such actions are necessary for the safety of inmates. Readers of this may be reminded of the story of the [Dallas 6](#), who were also subject to brutal cell extractions for protesting by covering their cell windows. Sal Rodriguez*

During this recent stay I witnessed, (as well as became collateral damage of) a typical IMU practice of cell-extraction, the forcible removal of an inmate from his cell. This is always an abusive overkill practice: At least five officers, (including women) in full SWAT riot gear and armed with pepper spray and often shock shields, storming a cell and pepper spraying, beating, electrocuting, stripping and then dragging the inmate off to a cold empty cell for 72 hours without clothing, mattress, or blanket.

The rarely asked question is: why do you ever need to do a cell extraction on an IMU housed inmate? First off, he is already in a cell which only contains the barest of necessities of existence: bedding, a rubber (flex) writing pen, paper and a couple of books; the water for sinks and toilets can be turned off from the outside.

The most common excuse used to frequently abuse men in this way is that the inmate covered their windowStaff needs to be able to make sure that the inmate is O.K.

The incident itself was as follows: The guy two cells away from me had full medium custody before being placed in segregation. The infraction that sent him to seg was a 5-point violation. This means that, if found guilty of this major rule violation, he would lose five of his accumulated custody level points. It takes the loss of ten custody points before you can be demoted in your custody level, and unless the infraction involved armed or gang activity violence, you can only be demoted in one custody level at a time. So this guy goes to his hearing and gets told that he is being demoted from full minimum to closed custody; a demotion of three custody levels. After speaking to the unit counselor, unit Sgt. and unit supervisor, and even though he didnt qualify to be demoted, each one stated they couldnt/wouldnt do anything about what the hearings officer was recommending.

The inmate decided to protest this unfair policy violation by staff and covered his window.

He repeatedly refused to uncover it until someone with enough authority to actually effect the outcome of the situation would come and talk to him.

The first thing the officers do is place magnetic strips over the 416 inch cell windows. Then they suit up and and pepper spray the guy. In every other case Ive seen this is all done in a matter of a few minutes, but not this time.

It usually goes like this: They stuff the nozzle in the cuff port and let off about a 15 second blast of pepper spray into the cell. Then they wait about 30 seconds, then order the person to cuff up. If he refused they immediately give a 30 second blast of spray, wait another 30 seconds. The offender is then given a final order to cuff up. Immediately, upon refusal they rush into the cell, with the lead person carrying a wrap-around shock shield. It looks like an inverted version of the standard shields carried by police forces; but has a button on the handle that allows the carrier to electrocute you once the shield makes contact. Four more officers are right behind the shield to make sure you are fully restrained and complying.

What happened in this case was that they went away after the first 30 second blast and left the guy in the cell for half an hour, burning and moaning and actually getting used to the pepper spray. So, having grown able to tolerate it he refused the second and third and fourth times they sprayed him, he was somewhat tolerating it. Those of us on the bottom tier and especially those of us in the next four cells were exposed to as much pepper spray as any intended recipient of a normally carried out spraying/extraction.

Now heres where I fail to follow the logic of my custodians. It was necessary to do all of that because they needed to visually check on the well being of IMU inmates? Ok, where was all that checking on the rest of us, when they covered our windows, then took two hours to extract him from his cellthen left our cell windows covered for another three hours?

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

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