

CORRECTIONS CONTRABAND INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

BY DAVID HALE
SENIOR SECURITY ADVISOR

TAKE AWAYS:



Smuggling into correctional facilities increased in two key ways: hand-carrying of documents by legal staff and exploiting inmate addiction programs.



Court facilities will continue to experience: proceeding disruptions, evacuations, and unwanted media attention without improved screening capabilities.

Fentanyl emerges as the leading substance in recent mail incidents, indicating escalating intent and resulting in injuries and disruptions

During the last quarter of 2023, the contraband smuggling pattern into correctional and court facilities persisted due to the protections provided to legal correspondence.

Without the ability to open legal mail, this provides an attractive means for smuggling, with 80% of contraband delivered via letters and small parcels.

Corrections facilities across the country are continuing to battle inmate access to smuggled narcotics and other harmful substances. Failure to do so has grave repercussions:

- Violence and erratic behavior of inmates
- Accidental staff exposure
- Inmate overdoses and deaths
- Persistence of criminal enterprises in correctional facilities
- Increased inmate interaction poses more risk of staff injuries

“ The observed Q4 incidents reinforce the continual shift in targets and methods in contraband smuggling. Using lawyers and legal staff increases the screening complexity and makes it even more important to implement a scalable and flexible screening solution. Courts are the latest weak link and will be exploited until they can reinforce their security capabilities. ”

– David Hale, Senior Security Advisor

Increased Complexities in Corrections

Hiding treated papers in protected legal materials is especially challenging, as they are nearly undetectable by manual inspection. A growing trend is lawyers and legal staff carrying contraband into the facilities and handing it directly to the inmates. As pointed out in public media coverage, this is being done both **knowingly and unknowingly by the members of law firms**.

A trend this quarter is the increased smuggling of Suboxone strips, also known as Buprenorphine, into **correction facilities with Buprenorphine programs** to ease inmate addiction. More inmates in these facilities are addicted to suboxone. Therefore, there is an increased need for the drug. This drives the smuggling by friends and family and fuels the criminal enterprise. The strips appear in the lining of envelopes, bindings of books, and other publications.

Disruptions in our Legal System

Meanwhile, courts are encountering a different type of threat – suspicious packages containing white powder threats. Whether benign or dangerous, the receipt of any substance disrupts court business. Facility evacuations are necessary, as is a **response by emergency services to assess the situation**.

Broaden Screening Protocols to Improve Detection

As best practice, it is recommended that correctional facilities screen any paperwork attempting to be delivered by hand, whether legal mail, religious, or any other protected mail group. These materials should be scrutinized as if they had been delivered through the mail stream. Court security should increase capabilities and standardize processes for screening mail, documents, and other deliveries. Historically, staff and equipment have yet to be prioritized for this purpose.

Advanced screening technology, like T-ray scanners, allows staff to screen mail, documents, housing units, and personal items without opening the object. Operators can easily and safely detect treated papers, powders, liquids, electronics, and other contraband. This protects staff from accidental exposure while reducing the time and resources devoted to the screening process.

For more insights on any information shared in this intelligence brief, contact the RaySecur Security Advisory Team at info@raysecur.com.

Inside Cook County Jail's battle against drug-soaked paper trade

October 4, 2023 – Chicago, IL

Thousands of pieces of paper funnel through the Cook County Jail every single day - cards sent to inmates, letters, tissue used inside books being read. But beyond the barbed wire, a search is being done right now. Fifty officers from the Cook County Sheriff's Office search Division 11, Tier CJ, where 40 inmates are in custody charged with murder or attempted murder and others with criminal sex assault, felon in possession of a weapon, and home invasion. Officers are there to find drug-soaked paper, and it's hard to sniff out.



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Woman sentenced to 20 months in prison for role in smuggling fentanyl into Yakima County jail

October 13, 2023 – Yakima, WA

A Parker woman has been sentenced to slightly more than a year and a half in prison for distributing fentanyl inside the Yakima County jail. Christina Rose Hegge, 42, pleaded guilty Thursday in Yakima County Superior Court to delivering fentanyl in the jail. In return for the plea, prosecutors dropped charges of conspiracy to deliver methamphetamine and fentanyl as well as a charge of introducing contraband in the jail.



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Portion of courthouse closed as hazmat crews identify suspicious powder found in envelope

October 17, 2023 – Baltimore, MD

The State of Maryland Health Department has announced that the powder found at the Cummings Courthouse was tested and no biological toxins were detected. They further advised the room where the white powder was found could be decontaminated and then reopened. The second floor of the Cummings Courthouse in downtown Baltimore was placed on lockdown Monday afternoon as hazardous materials crews investigate a suspicious powder. The Baltimore City Sheriff's Office said a court employee on the second floor opened a letter addressed from an inmate from a state correctional facility. The letter contained an unknown white powder substance.

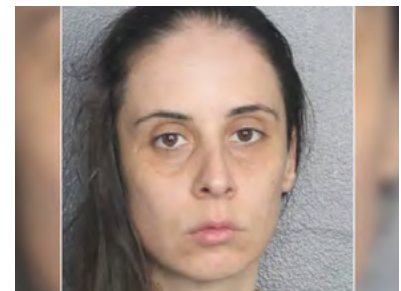


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Woman arrested for threats to Broward Sheriff and alleged bomb hoax

October 17, 2023 – Broward County, FL

A 36-year-old woman has been arrested on charges of making threats against a South Florida Sheriff and falsely claiming the presence of bombs throughout the county. Authorities say Stacey Lockett, a resident of Sunrise, was taken into custody on Wednesday on charges of corruption by threat against a public servant, making false bomb reports, extortion, misuse of 911, and intimidation. Investigators say the incident occurred on September 27th when Lockett contacted the Broward Sheriff's Office non-emergency hotline and asserted the existence of explosive devices scattered across Broward County, threatening to trigger them if Broward Sheriff Gregory Tony failed to comply with her demands.



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Pounds of meth seized in major drug bust at Minnesota post office

October 17, 2023 – Hibbing, MN

Authorities in northern Minnesota are reporting a massive drug bust that occurred at a post office. A news release issued by the St. Louis County Sheriff's Office says the bust happened Monday afternoon at the Hibbing Post Office. Agents from the Lake Superior Violent Offender Task Force, Minnesota BCA and U.S. Postal Inspectors Office took part in the massive drug seizure as part of a narcotics investigation.



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Man pleads guilty in Norfolk jail drug smuggling case

October 17, 2023 – Norfolk, VA

Rashad Dooley, the man sentenced earlier this year to 25 years in prison in connection to the killing of ODU student Chris Cummings, has pleaded guilty to trying to smuggle prescription opioids into the Norfolk City Jail. Dooley, 30, pleaded guilty to attempting or conspiring to deliver a controlled substance to a prisoner on Monday in Norfolk Circuit Court. He received a five-year sentence, which will run concurrently with the 25-year sentence.



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Long Beach man pleads guilty to smuggling drugs into multiple state prisons

October 17, 2023 – Gulfport, MS

The U.S. Attorney's Office announced Tuesday evening that a Long Beach man pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute FUB-AMB and 5F-MDMB-PICA, both of which are synthetic cannabinoids, into prisons in multiple states. Johnson Tran, 46, pleaded guilty on October 16, 2023, in U.S. District Court. According to court documents and information presented to the Court, in 2018, agents with the DEA received information from the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) that drug-laced letters and greeting cards were sent to inmates in the Bureau of Prisons from the Southern District of Mississippi. The drug-laced letters and cards were caught at prisons in Illinois, South Carolina, Florida, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

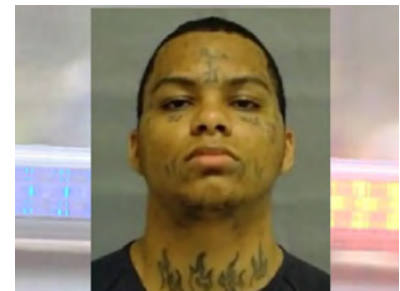


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Inmate pleads guilty to sending threatening letter to judge, framing another prisoner

October 18, 2023 – Orlando, FL

A prison inmate in Florida tried to clear his tracks but ended up pleading guilty to mailing threatening communications to a federal judge. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida reports the judge got the letter from someone with the initials M.S. who was an inmate at the Santa Rosa Correctional Institution. Officials spoke to M.S. and he denied making the threats, so they had the FBI conduct a DNA and fingerprint analysis. That led them to another inmate, Jeziah Guagno, whose DNA was on the envelope and palmprint on the letter.

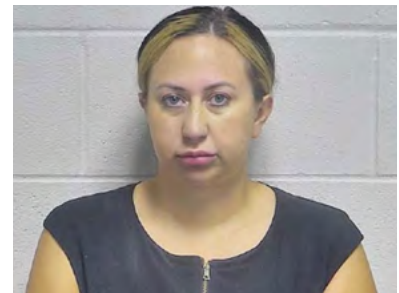


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Attorney charged with sneaking drugs into prison

October 26, 2023 – Louisville, KY

A Louisville attorney was arrested after allegedly bringing drugs into a prison for her client, WAVE News Troubleshooters confirmed. Ashlea Nicole Hellmann, 34, an attorney with the Fernandez and Maloney Law Firm, is charged with trafficking in synthetic drugs and promoting contraband. According to the police report, Hellmann brought papers that had been soaked in synthetic drugs into the Roederer Correctional Complex in La Grange. Originally, Hellman told police she didn't know what the papers were for. She later told the officer she "wanted to talk" and said knew something was wrong and that she "should have known better than to do it."



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Suspicious substance mailed to Powder River Correctional Facility was 'inert,' fire chief says

November 3, 2023 – Baker City, OR

An envelope received in the mailroom at Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City Wednesday morning, Nov. 1, contained a suspicious white powder that was not dangerous, although officials don't yet know what the substance is. "The powder tested benign; it was inert," Baker City Fire Chief Todd Jaynes said on Thursday, Nov. 2. Staff at the minimum-security prison at 3600 13th St. did preliminary tests for drugs and anthrax, all of which were negative, Jaynes said.

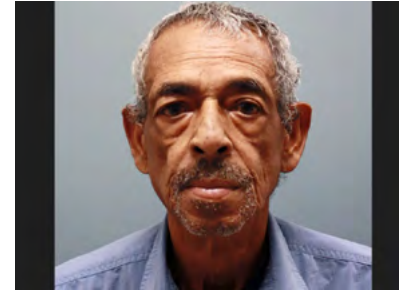


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Texas attorney accused of smuggling drug-laced papers to inmates in county jail

November 26, 2023 – Houston, TX

A Texas attorney has been accused of using work-related visits to a county jail to smuggle in legal paperwork laced with ecstasy and synthetic marijuana to inmates over the past several months, authorities announced Monday. Ronald Lewis, 77, was arrested on Friday after arriving at the Harris County Jail in Houston to visit an inmate, Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said at a news conference. During his arrest, Lewis had 11 sheets of paper believed to be laced with narcotics, according to authorities.



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Baton Rouge lawyer accused of smuggling drugs to inmate, attempting to pay off witnesses

November 30, 2023 – Baton Rouge, LA

A Baton Rouge lawyer tried to smuggle drug-soaked papers into parish prison and helped bribe a client's girlfriends not to come to court, sheriff's deputies said Thursday. But Stephen LeBlanc, 77, says he didn't know the papers had drugs or that the money was going to be used for witness tampering. He thought he was innocently helping his clients exchange papers and money. According to two affidavits, LeBlanc walked into East Baton Rouge Parish Prison on Nov. 2 to visit a client while carrying a manila folder and other paperwork.



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Gulf Shores lawyer sentenced to prison for smuggling drugs into Monroe jail

December 1, 2023 – Mobile, AL

A Gulf Shores lawyer who admitted to smuggling drugs into the Monroe County Detention Center will find himself behind bars. U.S. District Judge Kristi DuBose on Friday sentenced Michael Leonides Santos to four months in prison, followed by a year of supervision by the U.S. Probation Office. She also ordered him to undergo drug treatment and testing. Santos pleaded guilty in April to promoting prison contraband. He admitted to smuggling drugs to a federal prisoner who was being held at the jail. According to the defendant's written plea agreement, from November 2021 through February of last year, an inmate exchanged numerous "Chirp" text messages with Santos and others discussing the purchase of paper soaked in a synthetic cannabinoid known as "spice" The inmate discussed how profitable it was to sell the drugs to fellow inmates, the plea document states.

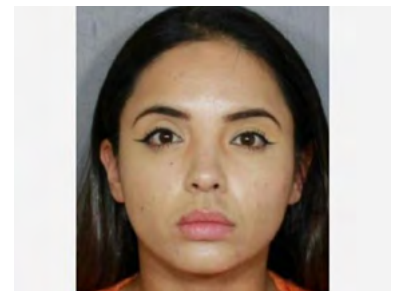


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Woman arrested for mailing drug-laden letters to Colorado inmate

December 8, 2023 – Weld County, CO

A 27-year-old Greeley woman, Monica Moreno, was arrested Thursday on accusations she sent mail to a Weld County Jail inmate that was soaked in narcotics. Moreno now waits inside the same jail. She faces two felony drug charges. The unnamed male inmate on the receiving end of her contraband-infused correspondence had two new charges added to his court file, also. One is a felony and one a misdemeanor. That male inmate was scheduled to be transferred to the Colorado Department of Corrections, according to the Weld County Sheriff's Office. Once there, he planned on selling the drug-soaked papers to the inmate population.



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Two more arrests made in drug smuggling scheme at the Harris County Jail

December 20, 2023 – Houston, TX

Two more people were charged for their alleged roles in the drug problem plaguing the Harris County Jail. Toney Jones, 31, who also goes by Devone Caldwell, and his girlfriend Ashley Sharpe, 33, are charged with engaging in an organized criminal activity. Kimberly Smith, a prosecutor with the Harris County District Attorney's Office Public Corruption Division, said Sharpe provided drug-soaked papers to Robert Robertson, a now former detention officer, who smuggled them into the jail to Jones.



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36 Buprenorphine strips found inside book headed to Red Onion State Prison

December 21, 2023 – Wise County, VA

36 Buprenorphine strips were found concealed inside of a book headed to Red Onion State Prison in Wise County last week. According to the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC), on Tuesday, Dec. 12, Centralized Mail Unit employees were inspecting mail bound for Red Onion State Prison when they found a book with 36 Buprenorphine strips concealed inside its spine.

This is not the first time VADOC employees have caught concealed drugs on their way into a prison. So far this year, the Centralized Mail Distribution Center has caught more than 100 pieces of mail containing suspected drugs before they could make their way into Virginia prisons.



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**DAVID HALE**

Senior Security Advisor at RaySecur

David Hale is a resident expert and trainer in narcotics and illicit drug detection in the Security Advisory Practice. He partners with customers across the country to assist in their mail screening operations to find dangerous substances and contraband in mail. Before joining RaySecur, David was a decorated law enforcement officer, where he worked on narcotics investigations, led special response teams, and was selected to be a member of the Federal Organized Crime and Drug Task Force. During his tenure, he frequently engaged with correction facilities on drug smuggling and trafficking investigations within the prisons. In addition, to law enforcement and investigations, he is skilled as a hazardous materials disposal and response operator.

RaySecur® is transforming correction contraband interdiction with safe, T-ray security imaging. With MailSecur®, operators see a live 3D video of the contents inside sealed objects to quickly detect hidden narcotics, drugs, treated papers, weapons, electronics, and more. Department of Corrections and law enforcement agencies trust MailSecur to safely detect smuggled substances in both mail and personal items. RaySecur's team of former law enforcement and military experts are available 24x365 for support and image analysis. MailSecur is the first desktop T-ray scanner to receive a Department of Homeland Security Safety Act Designation.

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