

CORRECTIONS CONTRABAND INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

BY WILL PLUMMER
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TAKE AWAYS:



Authorities disbanded smuggling rings which were inundating the facility with mail to by-pass screening efforts.



Correction facilities should remain on high-alert for the smuggling of fentanyl and take extra safety precautions.

The RaySecur quarterly mail security bulletin catalogs open-source mail incidents reported at correctional facilities nationwide. Postal mail is a leading method of smuggling illicit drugs and contraband into correctional facilities and jails. Due to a lack of consistent reporting, law enforcement leaders cannot gain a clear view of the problem and how to solve it. These reports serve to close that gap and provide timely information.

The third quarter of 2022 brought about interesting postal events in correctional facilities. The first was the break-up of several smuggling rings in different states. These rings used high mail volumes to overwhelm corrections staff in their screening efforts. It's a common smuggling practice to use a "swarm" of letters, birthday cards, or legal mail in the hopes that at least some of the illicit substances will be delivered to the inmate. The screening process was further bogged down when multiple senders sent mail to the same incarcerated individual.

Fentanyl is appearing in almost every drug entering the facilities, leading to increased inmate overdoses and staff exposure. The risk of exposure through inhalation, absorption, ingestion, or injection is high, making PPE important to staff safety. Just as staff wear gloves and a mask when executing cell searches, mail room screening should follow the same precautions.

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

Unknown substance causes HAZMAT scare at Attica Correctional Facility

April 6, 2022 — Attica, NY

An unknown substance in the mailroom caused a hazardous materials scare Tuesday at Attica Correctional Facility. The incident was reported about 10 a.m. after an unknown substance was reportedly found on a letter. Staff at the facility followed the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's hazardous materials protocol. They alerted the DOCCS central office and state police. "The incident was limited to the mailroom, immediately contained, and, due to the hazmat protocol followed, staff, incarcerated individuals and the community at large were not at risk," DOCCS officials said in a response to emailed questions. Attica firefighters and Wyoming County's hazardous materials response team were also alerted to the situation. The mailroom has been a source of vocal concern for the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association — the union representing corrections officers — over the past two years. The union has argued for the state's reinstatement of the Secure Vendor Program.



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Detectives allege Sunnyside woman mailed drugs into jail hidden in Bible, other books

April 15 2022 — Yakima, WA

Yakima County drug task force officers say a Sunnyside woman was mailing drugs hidden in books into the county jail and a state prison. Agents with the Law Enforcement Against Drugs task force said the woman was mailing the books disguised as shipments from Amazon, according to a probable cause affidavit. While acknowledging the allegations against the 53-year old woman were serious, Yakima County Superior Court Judge David Elofson ordered her released Friday under the pretrial release program, with reminders about future court dates sent out through text messages. On April 1, Yakima County sheriff's detectives told the task force, which consists of officers from the Washington State Patrol, the sheriff's office, and the Sunnyside, Granger, Grandview, Selah and Yakama Nation Tribal police departments, that an informant reported an inmate was receiving drugs in parcels and selling them to other inmates in the North Front Street jail. That same day, the jail found suboxone hidden within the cover of a Bible that had been mailed to the inmate, the affidavit said. The book came in a package that appeared to be from an Amazon warehouse but was actually mailed from a Sunnyside store that also offers shipping services. One of the store's owners told investigators that the package was sent by a woman who had sent six packages to the jail, and that the parcels were in recycled Amazon packaging, the affidavit said. On April 6, the inmate who was receiving the packages was transferred to the Airway Heights Corrections Center, where prison staff told LEAD investigators that they had intercepted parcels containing suboxone concealed in books and addressed to the inmate and another convict at the prison.

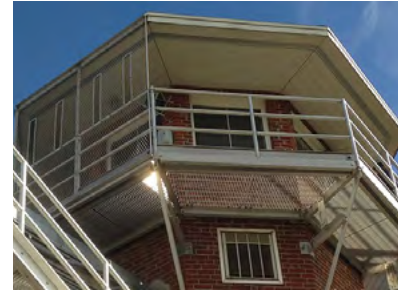


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Suspicious package discovered at WA State Penitentiary

April 28, 2022 — Walla Walla, WA

The Washington State Penitentiary evacuated its mailroom Wednesday after staff reported the presence of a white powdery substance when opening incoming mail. A book with white powder fell out of the package, according to the Walla Walla Fire Department incident log report. One staff member was exposed to the substance, triggering an emergency response at 11:29 a.m. “The exposed staff member was isolated, and the building was immediately evacuated,” Washington State Penitentiary spokeswoman Rochelle Stephens said. The Washington State Penitentiary’s Intelligence and Investigations Unit, along with the Walla Walla Fire Department, responded to the scene. It was determined that the unknown substance tested presumptive positive for methamphetamine. The mailroom staff member who was exposed to the substance was taken to a local medical facility for evaluation and will be monitored. The mailroom returned to normal operations the same day.



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Denver sheriff’s deputy fired for letting inmates order food into jail — which they used to smuggle drugs

May 3, 2022 — Denver, CO

A Denver sheriff’s deputy was fired after allowing two inmates — including one suspected of murder — to order burritos and Chinese food into the jail from outside restaurants, which the inmates then used to smuggle drugs into the facility. Derrek Peterson was fired Friday following an eight-month investigation that found he did not know that the inmates were using the food delivery to bring in drugs, but that he violated multiple policies by allowing them to order the food, according to a disciplinary letter obtained by The Denver Post through a public records request. Derrek Peterson is not believed to have known about the drug-smuggling scheme. A Denver sheriff’s deputy was fired after allowing two inmates — including one suspected of murder — to order burritos and Chinese food into the jail from outside restaurants, which the inmates then used to smuggle drugs into the facility. Derrek Peterson was fired Friday following an eight-month investigation that found he did not know that the inmates were using the food delivery to bring in drugs, but that he violated multiple policies by allowing them to order the food, according to a disciplinary letter obtained by The Denver Post through a public records request. The food was purportedly ordered and delivered through Uber Eats or Grubhub, according to the letter. One of the inmates said he had a relative that worked for one of the food delivery services. The two inmates, identified in the letter only by their initials TL and DW, distributed the smuggled drugs to others in the Denver Downtown Detention Facility in July. Investigators believe the drugs contributed to another inmate’s attempted suicide, which he survived. “Although thankfully, (the suicidal inmate) survived, the possibilities of what could have been smuggled in, and the potential dangers that could have been caused, are endless,” wrote Carl McEncroe, civilian review administrator at the Denver Department of Public Safety. “Deputy Peterson’s loss of objectivity in trusting TL and DW to the point where he would have allowed them to personally order ‘food’ from outside the jail is an act so serious that it demonstrates Deputy Peterson’s lack of fitness to continue holding the position of Denver deputy sheriff.”



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Flagler deputies intercept drug-laced birthday cards at jail

May 9, 2022 — Flagler County, FL

Flagler County Sheriff's deputies intercepted a drug smuggling operation into the jail, saying an inmate used birthday cards to try and smuggle them into the Sheriff Perry Hall Inmate Facility. The Flagler Special Investigations Unit investigated, and determined Eric Marcotte, 26, was having birthday cards sent to him with Suboxone strips glued inside. Suboxone strips contain opioids commonly used to treat withdrawal symptoms for more powerful opioids like heroin. Detectives first intercepted a piece of mail addressed to Marcotte on April 27. The birthday card had a peeling corner, and after inspection, they discovered a silver strip of tape located in between the card paper containing the strips. Sheriff Rick Staly said Marcotte just extended his stay in jail, "well, happy birthday to Eric," he said. "But it's not the surprise you were hoping for." Marcotte was charged with the Introduction of Contraband into a Correctional Facility. He was in jail on two felony charges of Grand Theft and Carjacking.



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12 arrested for allegedly smuggling narcotics into Larimer County Jail through mail

May 31, 2022 — Fort Collins, CO

Twelve people were arrested for allegedly smuggling narcotics into the Larimer County Jail through the mail, the Larimer County Sheriff's Office announced Tuesday. At the end of 2021, jail staff noticed an increase in narcotics being introduced into the jail that were not being detected by usual methods. Deputies began investigating and discovered suspicious activity involving an inmate's incoming mail, phone calls and text messages via the inmate communications system (tablet), the sheriff's office said. A deputy discovered coded language about narcotics, how to send them to inmates in the jail and how inmates would pay those on the outside for the narcotics, according to the sheriff's office. In March 2022, a letter mailed to an inmate was intercepted. The paper tested presumptive positive for methamphetamine, according to the sheriff's office. Jail staff contacted the Northern Colorado Drug Task Force (NDTF) in April, and authorities initiated "Operation Arts and Crafts." During the investigation, fentanyl, methamphetamine and Suboxone strips were found in mail sent to various inmates, according to the sheriff's office. In order to sneak narcotics into the jail, those on the outside would soak paper in narcotics, infuse narcotics into the ink and hide narcotics in the seams of envelopes, the sheriff's office said.



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Sumter woman arrested in connection with mail drug operation at prison

June 27, 2022 – Ridgeville, SC

A Sumter woman was arrested after allegedly running a mail drug operation at Lieber Correctional Facility in Dorchester County. Lisa D. Avins, 62, was arrested and charged with 10 counts of distribution of methamphetamines, two counts of possession of suboxone with intent to distribute, five counts of providing contraband to a prisoner, one count of criminal conspiracy and one count of possession of meth. The SC Dept. of Corrections Office of Investigations and Intelligence released the arrest warrants Monday. Officials say the charges involve sending meth, suboxone and tobacco through the mail to various inmates at Lieber, with instructions to give the drugs to an inmate who is connected to Avins.



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Will's 25-year career with the U.S. Army and Department of Defense spans service as a Master Explosives Ordnance Disposal Technician, to managing EOD operations as a commanding officer for all of Southeast Asia. He holds a Masters Degree in National Security and Irregular Warfare from the Naval War College.

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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