

## California Uses Long Term Indefinite Solitary Confinement More Than Any Other Government Entity In The World

*(both in absolute numbers and percentage of those incarcerated)*

Well over **12,000 adults in California** are confined in various forms of **extreme isolation**. In 2011, at **Pelican Bay SHU** (Secure Housing Units) alone, **500 men** had lived in solitary **over 10 years** and **78 men** for over **20 years**.



## Prisoners Are Not Sentenced To Long Term Solitary Confinement For Their Crime; They Are Assigned By CDCR

**CDCR administrators assign** prisoners to **long term indefinite solitary confinement**. In fact, California asserts people isolated in the SHU are **neither in solitary, nor being punished**.

**Long-term indefinite solitary confinement is rarely based on bad behavior**. Prisoners **assigned** to the SHU for **acts of violence or rule-breaking** receive a **maximum 5 years fixed SHU term**. Thousands of prisoners are in long-term solitary based on the prison's determination of **prison gang association, not for committing a violent act or breaking a prison rule**.

The **evidence of gang association** can be as **trivial** as who **signed their birthday card**, what **books** they read, the **art** they draw, or **who they say 'hi' to**. It is often based on general statements of **secret witnesses** who have **provided this information to get out of solitary confinement themselves** ("debriefing"). **Prisoners who are assigned to the SHU only for their associations often remain in solitary in the SHU for life, even with good behavior**.

There is **no trial**, only a **short hearing with no lawyer, no rules of evidence, no impartial hearing officer and no meaningful review**.

## Conditions of Confinement - Pelican Bay SuperMax SHU

**Concrete windowless** cells, **less than 8' x 12'**, contain a sink, a toilet, a **concrete stub to sit on**, a stub for a counter. **The men are in this tiny space at least 22 ½ hours a day.** Two bed slabs protrude from the back wall. Prisoners **sleep on a thin lumpy mattress with 2 light blankets.** The **door/wall is steel-plate with penny-sized holes.** A slot in the door is used to pass food trays and for prisoners leaving their cells to put their hands through **for shackling** on the few occasions they leave their 'pod'.

Prisoners **exercise alone** inside **cavernous dank concrete 'dog runs'.** The food, **lousy to disgusting,** rarely warm, is **insufficient in calories and nutrition.** **Never feeling sun, breathing fresh air, seeing a tree or a bird,** the prisoners are **never touched** except when **shackled.** **Solitary confinement creates and accelerates mental illness.**

They are housed in 'pods' of 8 cells, 4 on top and 4 on bottom. **All cells face a blank wall. They cannot see each other.** It is rarely quiet day or night. **It is hard to get a good night's sleep.** The men may buy a TV or a radio and have up to six cubic feet of personal property. They may send and receive mail (unless it is claimed they have broken a rule): all (non-legal) mail is read; some mail is not allowed in or out. **Unlike every other state, they may have a short phone call only after a close family death. Indigent prisoners have little.**

**Family visits are limited** to a few hours per week. They are conducted **on a telephone behind glass.** SHU prisons are **in remote locations, making visits costly and difficult.** **Many prisoners go without visits for decades.**

Pelican Bay is among the worst conditions. **But all of the SHU and Administrative Segregation housing across the state are horrific in their own ways,** for example Corcoran and Calipatria are **blistering hot** in the summer, often up to 110+ degrees in the day and **freezing cold** at night; **prisons not under scrutiny often have frightening practices by overzealous guards.**

## Severity of Confinement Does Not Increase Prison or Public Safety

**Prison violence is not reduced by extreme isolation.** However, the 2012 [Agreement to End Hostilities](#) issued by a **multiracial group of inmate representatives did reduce violence.** It stated in part:

***"This means from this date on, all racial group hostilities need to be at an end...; do not allow personal, individual issues to escalate into racial group issues."***

If the CDCR was interested in violence reduction, it would have agreed to distributed the Agreement. CDCR refused.

**This is not about freeing prisoners; this is about ending torture.**

<http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com>