

Central CA Women's Facility, Condemned Units (death row)

Excerpts from June 24, 2014 602 signed by 20 death row prisoners CCWF

- “Prolonged sleep deprivation is recognized as a form of torture, and can lead to suicidal thinking and/or tendencies.”
- “The U.S. Federal Courts have said, 'Sleep is critical to human existence, and conditions which prevent sleep have been held to violate the Eight Amendment...' Sleep deprivation causes high blood pressure, seizures, uncontrolled blood sugar levels, stress, depression, etc. ...”
- “Many of us have histories of seizures. Flashing lights, banging on doors and lack of sleep have caused some of us to go into seizures. Some of us have had to raise/change meds just to cope, because the monitoring/ banging/ beeping/flashlights. We're surprised nobody's has [had] a heart attack yet...”
- “To know that we have to exist/live under these conditions for the rest of our lives is overwhelming.”
- “This is torture. We are being emotionally, mentally and physically battered by the security checks throughout the nights.”

“Officers hold the flashlight for an excessive amount of time, knock on my door to awaken me continually...”

“I am tired, very lethargic, [have] memory lapse and get frustrated when I can't function as I did prior to this procedure.”

“I have a pacemaker. I see my cardiologist every 90 days and have explained to him how tired I am.”

“These 30 minute checks are unwarranted... We have had no suicide attempts. We had prior to this.. three quiet checks on 1st watch. We are general population housed in this unit for safety reasons, not suicide watch. This practice is not done throughout the prison.”

“The beeping device hits the door a minimum of 2 times per the 30 minute cycle with such force it startles anyone who is fully sleeping. Having a heart condition this really isn't good”

“I am fatigued everyday... I'm left vulnerable to all viruses, seeing my immune system is down.”

“I have mentioned many times [with medical] about having to deal without the proper amount of sleep, but it is always the same answer-- that they could do nothing about it.”

“Flashing light in our face, metal on metal hitting, banging. (No way to be quiet doing this) Some talk with others as they go (loudly), keys banging, spray can and baton hitting each other and the door as they pass by, boots clomping by and up and down stair-well etc. Beeping, Beeping, Beeping, Beeping”

“When asked to use the silent pipe at night or to do the “touching” to the door quietly instead of “hitting” it, they do it more loudly and hit the door 2 to 4 times each check.”

“Whoever thought of “metal on metal” was a torturer!

“It echoes into the cell like a blow-horn! There's an industrial fan ...so loud that the c/o's can't hear how hard they're hitting the cell doors. I have to have earplugs shoved in my ears, and my radio on next to me to be able to get any sleep, and I can still hear them hit the door! Wakes me up!”

“I've spoken to every mental health person available, and my yard doctor, and officers, and captains and the warden herself! I basically get attitude, “Then you shouldn't come to prison.” or “Oh, well.””

“The c/o's aren't trained, nor respectful... Plus ...this procedure is done with a heavy metal pipe... to ...a metal button on a metal door, to a cell that's all unpainted brick and metal (that echos the hit/bang upon contact...)”

“We feel we're being targeted for some reason... IT IS TORTURE, A SLOW, HORRIBLE, DAILY TORTURE!”

Pelican Bay SHU

“I learned to be disciplined for survival in prison, and SHU, but now I cannot focus. The things that I've disciplined myself to do in SHU now are interrupted and very difficult because of the sleep deprivation”

“They are attacking our minds! The one thing that keeps us going is our mind, so most people back here try to keep productive and active (mentally and physically) but it's just a matter of time till we are conditioned to a mummy-like state....”

"Deprivation of sleep is a common form of torture and has no place in a civilized society. Sleep is a basic human need and a fundamental constitutional right ...-Prisoner on hunger strike in Sept 2015

“Being in the SHU is hard as it is ... being by yourself and isolated, but it's torture when you can't sleep because of the nonstop banging of the metal doors, stomping by the guards, buzzers, and the guards shining a flashlight in your eyes two times an hour”

“I visited my son in the Pelican Bay SHU on Sept 12 [2015], and he is going crazy from not being able to sleep. I've never seen him like this. He couldn't think and he fell asleep while I was talking with him from across the glass partition,” said Dolores Canales, about her 38-year-old son, John Martinez.

“Our client is being treated like a prisoner of war, in a torture interrogation facility, when he is not allowed to sleep for more than 30 minutes at one time.” Attorney for John Martinez (in Pelican Bay), to CDCR leadership

John R. Martinez: Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus, September 23, 2015, from Pelican Bay SHU

- “...the security/welfare check procedure utilizing the Guard One System is intentionally inflicting cruel and unusual punishment upon petitioner (and others) through serious sleep deprivation....”
- “...it serves no legitimate purpose other than ...Harassment ...”
- “Without this Court's intervention, there is a reasonable probability that life-threatening injuries and/or even death is inevitable, as medical symptoms are ... worsening but not being treated.”
- “At times, I lay wide awake and it feels as if I have ulcers due to the aches in my stomach that I feel sometimes when I am unable to sleep.”
- John described people suffering severe headaches, migraines, burning acid stomach and cramps causing vomiting, high vital signs [high blood pressure], heart failure, ‘mini stroke,’ lethargy, loss of focus, stress, and serious irritation. “[They were] ... merely given Ibuprofen and advised to get some ‘rest.’”
- “Dr. Rushe, PhD. ... told Petitioner that the Security/Welfare Check Procedure was indeed harmful and served no real purpose and that she was getting ‘flooded with mental health referrals.’ ...[that] what he really needed was sleep...”
- “PhD Paul Butler ...told [a prisoner] that the Security/Welfare Check Procedure was a ‘dangerous’ policy and was causing ‘a lot of harm on you guys and the staff.’ ”

“...[A]s you know, they're killing us with these Guard One/Welfare Checks. ... I don't know what to do? We really are suffering right now and I can assure you that this is worse than the hunger strikes.”

Prisoners in PB SHU consider the 'checks' retaliation for their successes, including the Agreement to End Hostilities (created in 2012):

- “The prisoners collective spirit is alive! And I believe this is something that the administration feels, and fears! I think is the reason they have implemented the security/welfare checks!!”
- “...what does noise making have to do with suicidal prevention? I'm sure there are other ways, but they choose to retaliate due to the recent settlement. Now not only are we isolated in a dungeon, we're now being hit with more torturous acts and made to suffer more.”

“My son [in Pelican Bay SHU] doesn't have the energy to exercise, write, or draw nearly as much since the checks started. He used to write me letters 2-3 times a week; now maybe once a week, and only a few lines. He has hardly been able to sleep since early August, but is fighting to stay strong. I tell him ‘You are not alone.’”

“So the thing with this new "system" is that it's really more of another form of torture and adding sleep deprivation to our already torturous conditions by constantly banging on our cell doors, shining of flashlights in our face, and loud beeping noises that can be heard going off on each door all day and night, and waking us up each time. “

“At night the pod doors are especially loud. This happens 24/7.”

“...We can't sleep longer than 30 minutes ...and at times I'm jolted awake with my heart racing from the pod door or a hard hit to the button next to my cell by the c/o's wand.”

“As time goes on, I'm being more and more affected by the checks”

“I could block out the noise and disruption if it were 3 times a night, but this is so many times...”

“It's hard to study or concentrate. I tried to read for hours before this visit and could only read the same 4 pages over and over.”

[regarding the checks] “The warden claims that “safety” comes before everything- instead of CARING.”

“A couple of times, cool c/o's left front pod doors open, and that worked (it was quieter)! ...I got sleep.”

“Every sound thunders at night. “ “Ear plugs don't work.”

“Overall this is a detriment to us all, and staff are mad because they're being forced to do these welfare checks. And because of it, they're retaliating against us by depriving us from our program. Whether it's yard, showers, canteen, supplies, hair clippers/nail clippers, and serving us our meals, they blame it on the welfare checks. I'm telling you, it's getting ugly around here. ...”

“It's a state of waiting for somebody to explode.”

“No longer a legitimate mental health issue; it's a torment issue”

“It'll be quiet, then the doors open- BOOM! It makes my heart beat so fast and I can't go back to sleep.”

“I was told at medical- 'It seems like you just really need some sleep' But, I can't get sleep!”

“I’ve been in prison and in SHU for a long time. The noises are traumatizing.”

“I sent a detailed memo to the warden about ways to mitigate the noise problems with 30 minute checks, for example, keeping the doors open. I received no response”

“I have trouble focusing and/or thinking normally as I feel all discombobulated.”

“...one of the most senseless policies I have ever encountered. And it serves no purpose at all! [We] do not approve of it... It's counterproductive to its so-called intended purpose and does more harm than good.”

“These security checks keep us up all night long! It's crazy. And it's ...extreme intrusiveness.”

“And as if that isn't enough, staff can be overheard talking and laughing, all night long very loudly.”

“The Doctors and Psychs are unable to do anything for us besides give us aspirins and a pair of earplugs that are useless when staff wake you up with their flashlights and damn racket.”

“You have some old prisoners that have heart problems, diabetes, and hypertension that are here and can't afford to be going through this crap.”

“We can't go on like this for much longer. This ...is no joke and, from someone that went through the hunger strikes from start to end a couple of years ago, this ...is much worse than that. ... You can't hide from it.”

“All day distress from not sleeping. The sleep disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment...”

“...This is contrary to our welfare, affecting our physical and psychological health!”

“ Most of the day I am left feeling sluggish and sometimes feeling in a trance-like state.”

“Is the state attempting to curtail problems, or is it attempting to create them?”

“Each time the c/o's walk in, I get mad real quick... I've been real agitated due to this noise making. ... I'm in this environment, now noise is involved- it's some kind of torture tactic that was added. I try to read, write, study, and I lose my thoughts quickly as I hear banging in other sections before coming into my section. As I write this, here they come BEEP, BEEP, BEEP...”

“Is this an attempt to create mentally ill patients of the state?”

“I'm tired and can barely gather more thoughts as to how I'm being affected by these welfare checks, but there is banging and beeps all day all night...”

“...a fellow inmate asked the c/o “to please not bang the baton/wand” ...as it hurts his ears. [The c/o] responded by banging the baton/wand harder to create a louder [noise] and started laughing saying, “602 it.””

“... It is like a construction site all night. It is horrible.”

“For decades, military and police forces have used ‘extreme isolation, sleep deprivation and constant banging/noise, to cause mental/physical torment and try to break a person’s mind or human will to resist questioning. These are so-called clean torture methods. So CDCR/PBSP cannot possibly claim, ‘We did not know the cause or effect of this new program’s use of extreme isolation, sleep deprivation, and constant noise/banging.’”

“One would think that if these “welfare checks” were actually intended for our welfare, they would be conducted in a manner that wouldn't affect our sleep as they are.”

“Due to the already deplorable conditions, these checks are causing us further hardship. The effects of sleep deprivation are well documented so I hope this testimony can help to provide an eyewitness-living account of how CDCr & PBSP administrations are psychologically torturing us.”

“If inmates do suffer from psychiatric problems then they should be housed in an appropriate unit under supervision. ...We however do not have such psychiatric concerns. If ...this action is intended to prevent inmates from physical and self harm, it should not create an environment or make policies and procedures that lead to such.”

“I've lost weight and my vitals have shot up and all I got was some aspirin, and [told] that it was out of their hands.”

“I'm still suffering the effects of the torture checks. It will be with me until I die.”