

## Santa Cruz County Main Jail Background



Located near the heart of downtown Santa Cruz, the Santa Cruz County Main Jail is the only detention facility in the County providing maximum security units. The Main Jail has been in operation since 1981. The initial 47,000 square foot structure, able to house 92 inmates was built at a cost of \$8.5 million. A 23,000 square feet addition was built in 1986 – at a cost of \$6 million -- that increased the jail's capacity to 230 inmates of both genders. Further modifications were made in 1999, that allowed for a capacity of 311- this is the Main Jail's capacity today. Approximately 13,000 people are booked at the Main Jail each year.

### WHO EXACTLY IS IN JAIL?

As a "Class II" detention facility, the County's Main Jail is designed to house inmates being tried for crimes, pending arraignment, and serving a sentence. Other detention situations include:

- awaiting sentencing
- awaiting trial and unable to post bail
- convicted of crimes with sentences of no longer than a year
- awaiting transportation back to state prison for parole violation
- minimum and medium security inmates who require medical care
- already convicted of very serious crimes whose case is on appeal (doing "soft" time)

Recent reports indicate that close to 75% of inmates in the Santa Cruz County Main Jail are repeat offenders. On average, 52% of inmates are White, 40% Hispanic, and 6% Black. The average age, 33 years. Most of the time, the Main Jail's population eclipses its state-rated maximum capacity of 311.

### TOO MANY INMATES

Overcrowding is a major problem, and the Jail's staff deals with it in a number of ways. Plastic "boats" – that sit directly on the floor -- are placed in housing units' day and common rooms and used as temporary beds. The combination on triple bunks and boats allow the jail to accommodate 422 inmates – far above the state-rated capacity of 311. If the jail's population rises to 439 the Sheriff must request early release of inmates from a judge. Between July 1, 2016 and April 2017 this happened 9 times.

Part of the serious over-population Issue at the Main Jail is due to the passage of AB109 – the Public Safety Realignment Act. In 2011, AB 109 was passed to deal with overpopulation in the state prison system. Non-violent, non-serious, and non-sex-offenders are now allowed to serve their sentences in jails instead of prisons. Today, inmates who are detained for crimes that carry longer sentences are serving their time in facilities (the Main Jail included) built for short-term stays.

## HOW ARE INMATES CLASSIFIED (AND HOUSED)?

In order to fully understand the internal workings of the Main Jail, one needs to examine its classification system. Using the National Council of Crime and Delinquency's classification system (which evaluates 10 different factors that increase or decrease "points for an inmate") the Jail decides if an inmate in minimum, medium, or maximum security. Factors involved in this important decision – made within 24-hours of booking – include escape risk, gang affiliation, level of violence, crimes committed, and medical needs.

The classification system is formal, beginning with a booking supervisor and then being passed to the jail's classification correctional officers. These officers interview every new inmate and eventually determine their classification and housing placement at the facility.

Inmate housing is separated into North, South, and West wings – each containing several units that separate inmate based on their classification. Here's the breakdown:

- North Wing (A-D) -- mental health and special needs units
- South Wing (E-H) – pre-classification and two women's units
- West Wing (J-Q) – men's maximum security, medical oversight, disciplinary

Housing units are constantly shifting and changing based on the gender, classification, and number of inmates being held in the Main Jail. Members of competing gangs including White Power, Bloods, Crips, Surenos, and Nortenos find themselves in jail often. The jail tries its best to house gang members in separate units – each with its own exercise yard and recreation room. Sex offenders, those with psychological problems, and those who are violent are segregated from the general population and housed in a special needs unit. The only time inmates interact with inmates from other units is during trips to and from court.

The Jail is designed in a curious fashion. There are no outside windows in each housing unit. This allows officers to examine the activity of inmates through a one-way window without being seen themselves. Inmates cannot see into central command. Think of a zoo and one-way glass. Central command has dimmed red lighting so the officers have visual access into each well-lit housing unit. No officers are located within the inmate housing areas. This type of detention facility is called a "podular design system."

## LIFE IN AN AVERAGE UNIT

Inmates are served 3 meals each day – at 6 AM, 11:30 AM, and 5 PM – receiving a mandated 2,600 calories. For each meal, inmates are given 30 minutes to eat and dispose. Each housing unit has an outdoor exercise area for basketball or handball. Board games, cards, puzzles, and a limited selection of books are available. Another important part of life in each unit is the TV- in Spanish and English. A video of the Main Jail's rules and what is expected of an inmate is shown every day from 3-4 PM on the TV in the day room of each housing unit.

Each and every inmate is responsible for the cleanliness of their housing unit. Privileges are withheld until the entire area is clean – swept and mopped daily.

The system is designed in a way that few jail staff are needed. Around 15 correctional officers have 12-hour shifts, four days a week. Staff at the Main Jail is rotated often – in the Jail itself, and also between other facilities. This allows them to fully understand how all areas of the jail are run and reduces job fatigue.