

State

Justice Dep't files plan to upgrade jails

HOUSTON — The Justice Department Monday filed its plan for upgrading conditions in the Texas prison system, demanding an end to the practice of putting three inmates to a cell, with some sleeping on floor mattresses.

The filing followed a ruling last December by U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice, who said conditions in the nation's largest prison system violated inmate rights. He ordered parties in the case to draft solutions.

The judge acted in response to a suit filed against the Texas Department of Corrections alleging the rights of 30,000 prisoners were violated through overcrowding, substandard inmate security and inadequate medical care.

Lawyers for the plaintiff inmates and the State of Texas already have filed their proposals. The judge was expected

to evaluate the proposals and issue a detailed order calling for specific reform actions.

"The Texas Department of Corrections has been, by the admissions of its own officers, severely overcrowded for years," the government said in legal papers filed in the case.

The 23-page Justice Department proposal calls for an immediate end to the practice of placing three inmates in a cell and a bed and sheets for every prisoner. A Justice Department spokesman said an estimated 3,000 inmates in the prison system currently are sleeping on floor mattresses rather than beds.

The proposal said two prisoners should not be confined to a cell of less than 60 square feet, and every prison dormitory must have 40 square feet per inmate.

It also suggested:

- The state must show the need for new facilities before constructing them, and new facilities must house a maximum of 500 prisoners located near a population center.
- The system must reduce its guard-prisoner ratio from the current one guard for every 11 inmates to one guard for every six inmates.
- The state must develop standards governing the use of physical force.
- No prisoner or group of prisoners should have administrative or supervisory authority over other prisoners or be placed in a position to administer disciplinary action.
- The prison system's Huntsville Hospital, the only prison hospital in the state, must be closed unless certain conditions are corrected.

Tornadoes don't drop from the clouds

COLLEGE STATION — March traditionally brings an increase in the number of tornadoes in Texas, and this year two Texas A&M meteorologists are warning Texans not to judge a tornado by only its funnel.

In fact, they say their work indicates tornadoes do not drop from the clouds as most people believe, so reacting on the basis of a funnel alone could be deadly.

Texas suffers a dramatic increase in the number of tornadoes in March and the number hits a peak during April, May and June, when twisters may average as many as one a day across the state.

Tornadoes already have killed two people and injured half a dozen this year even though January and February are the least likely months for the storms to occur, according to weather records.

At Texas A&M, Dr. Phanindramohan Das and Fred Proctor, a graduate student working on his doctorate, use information from government computers in Colorado to mathematically examine the forces that combine to form a tornado.

They say such an approach can provide valuable insights into the storms which may help humans construct safer buildings, make

better emergency decisions and perhaps even improve twister forecasts in the future.

Proctor's model — worked out on computers at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder with support from the National Science Foundation — suggests the public should not judge a tornado by the appearance of a funnel alone because there may be a swirling vortex at ground level well before the funnel touches down.

If the theory is correct, it seems likely that most tornadoes form at the same time in the clouds and on the ground. They do not "drop" from the clouds as many people

believe, according to the scientists.

"As the vortex intensifies at ground level, the pressure inside lowers and the funnel cloud expands while developing in a downward direction," said Das.

"Observations of dust and debris at the surface just below a funnel cloud seem to support this view," he explained.

Proctor said the computer model of twister structure has already shown that in theory, tornadoes can begin to form within a field of vortex motion if special temperature and precipitation circumstances exist.

Proctor said that theory has been substantiated by field stu-

dies on waterspouts in which the surface of the sea is seen to swirl before the funnel descends a significant distance from the clouds.

Das and Proctor believe there are three simultaneous processes that combine to form the funnel. First is an intense updraft of air rising from the ground to the clouds and the second is the "in-draft" of air occurring close but parallel to the ground. The third force is the vortex motion that encircles both the updraft and in-draft motions.

They said the current research could also answer questions about why the tornadoes are often associated with violent rainstorms.

Oilspill covers 10 miles of beaches, cleaning starts

CORPUS CHRISTI — Coast Guard officials Monday said clean-up operations may begin today to remove thousands of gallons of thick brown oil sludge that washed up on a 10-mile stretch of south Texas beaches.

Capt. Gerald Hinson, Port of Corpus Christi commander, said the oil sludge Friday began washing up on Port Aransas and Mustang Island beaches.

"We cleaned up a swath of beach Saturday and more oil washed up right behind us," Hinson said. "There were no new impact(ed areas) Sunday and if there are no new impacts today, we'll begin clean-up."

Hinson said a 10-mile stretch of beach was covered with a 10 to 20-foot wide swath of oil about a quarter-inch thick. He said most of the oil on beaches was in the Port Aransas area, but some had been spotted near San Jose Island.

"I don't expect any long-term environmental damage," Hinson said. "If it were a rocky beach, it would be a whole lot more difficult to clean. The sandy beaches are much easier."

Hinson said the oil spill was difficult to spot from aerial searches because the oil was submerged below the Gulf's surface.

Nueces County Commissioner J. P. Luby, whose district includes the effected beaches, said Sunday that he believes the oil spill to be part of the Ixtoc I spill, which stained Texas beaches in 1979.

"We were having 30,000 barrels a day gushing up (in 1979) and a lot of that oil went to the bottom in sand bar areas," Luby said. He added that rough waters may have loosened the oil from the Gulf bottom.

Luby expressed concern over losing tourist trade expected when colleges recess classes for spring vacations.

But Hinson said he does not believe the oil was from Ixtoc.

"The oil we've been finding is not nearly as weathered as the Ixtoc oil," Hinson said. "I can't believe it would be floating around the Gulf this long and appear to be fresh oil."

Hinson, who said clean-up operations could be completed in a matter of days, said Coast Guard investigators have not determined the source of the spill.

"It could've come from the continental shelf," Hinson said. "It could have been tankers or other such sources. The investigation is ongoing."

Bill would block multiple sales

AUSTIN — The old trick of going to six different doctors and six different drugstores to get an extra supply of powerful drugs will no longer work if a citizen committee has its way.

The Senate Affairs Committee today will consider a bill blocking such schemes. The bill is part of the Texans' War on Drugs package.

It would set up a state computer to keep track of who is prescribing, who is filling prescriptions and who is buying how much of the Schedule II and Schedule III drugs considered dangerous.

The drugs listed in the computer would include dialudid, preludein, amphetamines and methaqualone. The information in the computer would be unavailable to the public.

The information would be coded and the computer would flag doctors, pharmacists or consumers with aberrant patterns of prescribing or consuming.

Sen. Ray Farabee, D-Wichita

Falls, sponsor of the bill, said it also would cut down on prescription forgery. He said that because prescription blanks are not controlled now, forgery is easy and widespread.

The bill would require prescriptions for the dangerous drugs to be written on triplicate, serially numbered forms printed by the state on special, hard-to-duplicate paper.

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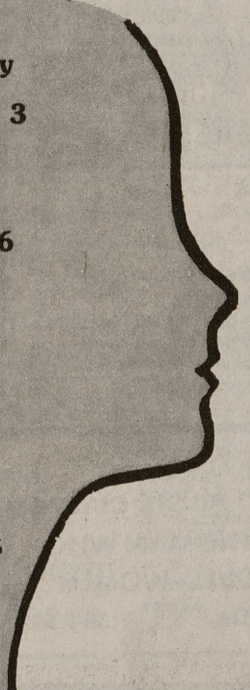
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