

Brazos County Jail overcrowding not from TDC overflow

By RaeAnn Warmann
Reporter

The heavy iron door thuds as it slams shut, and the lock, flashing into place, makes an eerie echo through the vacant hall.

There's not much sound coming through the small windows lined up neatly one after another, the first looking like the second, which looks like the third, and so on.

If you were on the other side of that window, you could be a big problem for Brazos County — you could be overcrowding the jail.

But overcrowding in the Brazos County Jail is a problem originating within the county system, not from any overflow of prisoners from the Texas Department of Corrections, Brazos County Sheriff Ron Miller said Monday.

To avoid overcrowding, the Texas prison system is trying to remain under the 95-percent ceiling on the number of inmates the system takes in. The system has been closed down twice in the past three weeks.

"We took 269 prisoners over to the TDC last year, and this year, we've already taken about 25 prisoners over there, and they haven't refused them yet," Miller said.

Monday the jail was carrying 128 inmates: 80 were convicted of felonies, 18 were convicted of misdemeanors and 30 were serving time. The jail has 160 cells, but this is not a realistic figure, Miller said. Six prisoners are sleeping on the floor of the jail, even though bunks are available.

"You have to classify prisoners, not just put them wherever there's a bunk," the sheriff said.

Classifications are according to the inmates' charge and sex, Miller said. Murderers will not be jailed with shoplifters.

"There's five to six women in the women's tank, and it's a 12-man tank," Miller said. "Naturally you can't put a male in there with them."

The sheriff said the main problem is the county court, which gives 30 days in the county jail to

those convicted of misdemeanors, such as misdemeanor theft, shoplifting, driving while intoxicated and simple assault charges. Only two 12-man cells, which make 24 bunks, are set aside for these prisoners, leaving six to sleep on the floor, Miller said.

"You reach a point where you can only put so many on the floor," the sheriff said. "When that happens, we start turning them loose, starting with the misdemeanors first, and then some of the serving timers."

"Serving timers" are those who are brought in after 5 p.m., spend the night and then released before 7 a.m.

Located on the fourth floor of the Brazos County Courthouse in Bryan, the new county jail is attached to the old jail, which recently has been renovated.

Because of recent changes in jail laws, Miller said prisoners will have to be classified by charge, sex and age group, and age group division will take up even more jail space.

Fifty-one guards work at the jail, which costs the county close to \$1 million per year, Miller said. One guard is required for every 48 inmates, and it takes about 4.2 to 4.3 jailors to fill one position considering 24-hour surveillance, vacation and sick leave. Miller said each additional inmate adds to the cost.

The sheriff suggests a minimum security facility be built that would need fewer guards, would require less maintenance and could be constructed of conventional material such as wood, concrete or brick.

"They wouldn't have to be housed in a piece of iron because you don't have the escape problem," Miller said. "I could see 40 prisoners moving out of this jail right now, and that would eliminate my overcrowding problem."

"It costs us about \$30 a day per inmate, whereas if you go into a facility like this (minimum security facility), you're going to cut it down considerably," he said.

Reagan urged by congressman to create U.S. oil industry policy

Oilmen investing in old wells instead of drilling new ones

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Texas congressman advised President Reagan and Energy Secretary John Herrington on Wednesday to put ideology aside and create an energy policy that will help the devastated domestic oil industry.

At a hearing of the House subcommittee on energy and power, Rep. John Bryant, D-Dallas, admonished the administration for pushing a free market policy that permits foreign governments to manipulate the price of oil at the expense of domestic producers.

"The issue is price," Bryant said. "Do you agree that the price of oil is unreasonably low because of manipulation by a foreign government, specifically Saudi Arabia?"

Herrington agreed. Bryant continued, "Then I say to you, what is the administration doing to protect the domestic industry from that kind of a foreign onslaught? Your philosophy is we just can't do that?" to which Herrington also said yes.

Herrington defended the administration's policies, saying that a DOE analysis of all the energy options, including an oil import fee, is being compiled and should be completed by the end of the month.

"Is this the one the president asked for right before the elections last November?" Bryant asked. "And you still have no proposals

FORT WORTH (AP) — Despite the steep rise in crude prices in recent weeks, most oil industry observers forecast little, if any, increase in drilling this year.

Although some Texas oilmen say they will drill more wells, others are shifting their focus — and money — to buying already established oil and gas production.

"This year we're probably going to put 80 percent of our would-be drilling budget into acquisition of producing properties," said Fort Worth oilman Ray Richey, 31, a college accounting graduate who formed his own oil company at age 23.

In 1983, Ray Richey & Co. drilled 50 oil and gas wells. It drilled only 20 in 1986, when oil prices made a record drop.

This year, Richey expects to drill

but "five or 10" wells, and that will be done in part to keep leases that would otherwise expire.

"Frankly, it's a heckuva lot easier to raise money (from outside investors) to buy producing properties than it is to raise money for a drilling deal right now," Richey said.

Drilling, fraught with often unpredictable costs and the potential for dry holes, poses a much higher risk than buying existing oil and gas reserves, Richey said.

His company, which raises much of its money from a stable of 80 to 100 regular investors, expects to spend at least \$4 million this year buying producing wells. Richey hopes to close a deal March 2 for the purchase of 46 wells in Eastland County in west central Texas.

four months after the president finally addressed this issue?"

Herrington said the administration is currently pursuing a policy that encourages further domestic oil exploration offshore and in Alaska along with a series of de-regulatory measures designed to

aid the domestic energy producers and cut oil imports.

"I'm obviously for all these proposals," Bryant said, "but they are not going to raise oil revenue to a survivable level."

The consumption of Persian Gulf oil by Americans grew from six percent in 1985 to 15 percent

last year, the highest percentage since 1981, while overall oil imports climbed from 27 percent in 1985 to 36 percent by the end of last year.

"Decreasing our dependency on foreign oil is our primary goal," Herrington said.

"How do you propose to do this when you are buying oil from Mexico instead of from our own domestic producers?" asked Bryant.

Herrington said the DOE purchases Mexican oil for the country's strategic reserves because it is cheaper than American oil and asked Bryant how he would explain to the American people why the government should pay the higher price.

"We would prefer to buy from U.S. producers," but they didn't bid a low enough price to make a purchase economically reasonable, Herrington said. "I do not believe the U.S. government should set the price for oil — the market should."

Bryant countered by asking whether Herrington thought the Saudi Arabians had manipulated the international oil market to bring the price of oil to an artificially low level, to which the secretary said yes.

"Then why shouldn't we do something to force the price back up to where domestic producers can survive?" Bryant asked.

Mexico cracks down on diet pill dispensers

DALLAS (AP) — Diet clinics just over the border in Mexico were shut down briefly because of health worries about the pills they dispensed, but have since reopened under severe restrictions, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Mexican authorities advised the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Tuesday they were shutting down the clinics in Nuevo Laredo and Juarez, but they revised that statement Wednesday to say the clinics had re-opened, FDA spokesman Donald Heaton said.

"Now they are under severe restriction," he said. "Each one is limited to 10 to 15 patients per week and may only issue up to 60 prescriptions per week for the so-called diet products. And when they do issue one, the Mexican health department has to get a copy of it."

Heaton said no deaths have been proved as a result from use of the diet pills, but he said they

can aggravate high blood pressure, heart disease and mental problems such as schizophrenia.

The U.S. Customs Service has ordered its border checkpoints to stop anybody crossing into the United States carrying the diet pill Redotex — which the FDA considers dangerous — and confiscate the drug.

"We feel that ought to take care of things," Heaton said. "The import alert will give our Customs the backing to remove these materials from Americans who go down there. And the Mexican government's restrictions will help."

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, the Texas Department of Health halted its investigation into the deaths of four Texans who perished within the last year after taking the Mexican diet pills.

"We haven't established any association" between the deaths and use of the pills, TDH spokesman Dennis Baker said, adding that no

further investigations will take place until additional evidence is found.

The Customs alert for Redotex also expressed concern about some otherwise legal drugs — including Ponderex and Moduretic — being taken along with Redotex.

But Customs apparently was not told to automatically detain them unless they were being brought in along with a supply of Redotex, officials said.

FDA spokesman Ed Nida said the import alert called for Customs to "automatically detain all entries including those encountered . . . during routine examination of baggage, of Redotex; and other diet drugs mentioned above if encountered in combination with Redotex."

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