

# Pneumonia plagues Houston inmates

BOSTON (AP) — Overcrowding and poor ventilation helped spread a deadly pneumonia outbreak at a Houston jail, where prisoners averaged less than 6-by-6 feet of living space, according to a federal report.

The outbreak, which occurred in 1989, was the first of what has turned out to be a series of episodes of pneumococcal infection in crowded places.

"We think this was a sentinel in the reemergence of that disease," said Dr. Robert F. Breiman of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Breiman's team investigated the Houston outbreak, which struck 46 inmates, killing two, in a one-month period. The bacteria, called streptococcus pneumoniae, can cause pneumonia or a more serious blood infection.

At the time, the 13-story Harris County Jail was the third largest in the United States. It was designed for 3,500 inmates but housed 6,700. Half slept on mattresses on the floor.

Since then, the county has opened a new facility, and the jail where the outbreak occurred now has 3,746 prisoners.

Maj. Mike Quinn of the sheriff's office said a new ventilation system has been designed but not yet installed.

"The overcrowding did not cause the disease. It was a vehicle for its spread," said Quinn.

The CDC report on the outbreak was published in Thursday's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

The report blamed the outbreak on overcrowding, poor air circulation and susceptibility of inmates to catching the bacteria, because of AIDS infections, drug abuse and other health problems.

"My gut feeling is the thing that played the greatest role was overcrowding, but it was a combination of all three," said Breiman.

The prisoners had an average living area of 34 square feet. Current engineering standards suggest that inmates have at least 50 square feet.

The CDC found that nobody in the Houston jail with more than 80 square feet of living space got sick.

The investigation also found that the jail ventilation system delivered six square feet of outside air per person each minute, while the recommend level is 20 square feet.

Since the Houston outbreak, similar clusters of pneumococcal infection have been seen at military bases, hospitals, day care centers and nursing homes.

Breiman said this is probably because there are more people with weak defenses against disease, in part because of AIDS infections, drug abuse and medical treatments that weaken immunity, such as transplant medicines.

# Courter rules out protecting bases

## San Antonio fears more cuts

WASHINGTON (AP) — The former chairman of the base-closings commission said Wednesday that he has ruled out being a paid consultant for any community seeking to defend its military installations against shutdown.

Jim Courter, who headed the independent Base Closure and Realignment Commission during its 1991 and 1993 rounds, had considered a \$75,000 contract from the city of San Antonio to help it protect its five bases during next year's round.

Through an intermediary, Courter confirmed last week that he would reject the contract because of fears that such a deal could be perceived as improper.

In an interview Wednesday, the former Republican congressman from New Jersey said: "I'm not going to be retained by any community."

"I don't think it's appropriate, even though it's proper and legal and everything," added Courter, who now practices law in Hackettstown, N.J. Former commissioners are

prohibited from directly lobbying the panel. But under ethics rules, they aren't barred from advisory or planning roles.

Courter was clearly reluctant to discuss his dealings with San Antonio, other than to say that officials there are "terrific people."

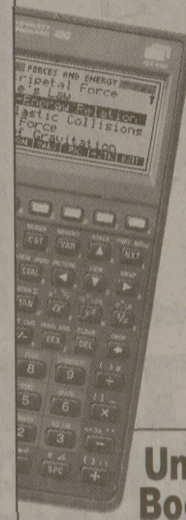
"The story is over. I'm not under contract. I'm not getting any money," he said when asked to explain why he had first considered and then rejected the contract.

San Antonio is home to four Air Force bases — Kelly, Randolph, Lackland and Brooks — as well as the Army's Fort Sam Houston. Like many military cities nationwide, San Antonio is bracing for next year's round of cuts — which is expected to be the harshest yet. Kelly Air Force Base, which was reviewed last year for closure and later taken off the cut list, is expected to also land on next year's list.

Local lawmakers and the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce have geared up for a nearly \$500,000 lobbying effort to protect Kelly.

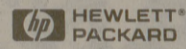
Kelly, which is home to the San Antonio Air Logistics Center, is the largest of the city's defense installations.

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