

# Texas leads U.S. states in arrests

WASHINGTON (AP) — If Texas were a separate country, it would be putting a percentage of its population behind bars faster than any other nation, according to a study being released Monday.

The report by Justice Policy Institute, which supports alternatives to prison, showed that the Texas prison population's annual growth rate was 11.8 percent during the '90s, which meant it added one in every five inmates to the nation's prisons.

"If Texas were a country, it would have the highest incarceration rate in the world, easily surpassing the United States and Russia, the next two finishers, and seven times that of the next biggest prison system in China," according to an Institute statement issued Monday.

The study report stated that Texas imprisoned people at a faster rate than any other state in the last decade, but its crime rate is higher than other large states with smaller prison populations. In fact, the state's crime rate fell at half the national average and the least of any of the nation's five largest states, the report stated.

A Texas prison official said the last decade's growth was a response to a prison revolving door during overcrowded conditions, and the state's incarceration rate slowed in the latter part of the decade.

The study's authors zeroed in on Texas' prison system after the Bureau of Justice reported earlier this year that

the Texas prison population of 163,190 had surpassed California's, 163,067. California's population of 32 million is almost twice that of Texas.

"The sheer magnitude of what is going on in Texas alone is startling," said Jason Ziedenberg, the study's co-author.

**"We're obviously concerned about the state that's responsible for one-fifth of all new prisoners between 1990 and 1999."**

— Jason Ziedenberg  
Co-author of Justice Policy Institute Study

"Not just that it surpassed California, but if you look at it in the context of a state like New York with a million or so fewer citizens, they (Texas) have got double the amount of people behind bars. ... We're obviously concerned about the state that's responsible for one-fifth of all new prisoners between 1990 and 1999."

The Justice Policy Institute is a think tank of the Center on Juvenile

and Criminal Justice, and the study was paid for with a grant from the Center on Crime, Communities and Culture. The groups provide programs for families of inmates and look for other solutions to criminal behavior beyond prisons, such as substance abuse treatment.

The study comes as Texas prison officials are pressing for money to build more lockups and as the inmate population is closing in on the system's capacity.

Earlier this month, Tony Fabelo, executive director of the state Criminal Justice Policy Council, told elected officials that, without a change in parole rates and policies for returning parole violators to prison, Texas will likely need prisons to hold 14,600 additional inmates by August 2005.

On Friday, Fabelo said Texas' rapid incarceration occurred when the state went on a prison-building binge. Before that, the state intermittently released inmates to relieve overcrowding and comply with court-mandated capacity levels.

"Texas is a very large state with a growing population. In the 1980s, we had a broken system with a backlog," Fabelo said. "A great deal of the incarceration has been dealing with the revolving door."

Fabelo said that while the incarceration rate grew by 12 percent from 1990-95, it was 6 percent during 1996-98.

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# Fires still blaze but lull slightly

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Beleaguered firefighters in Montana enjoyed something of a lull in their battle against dozens of wildfires, although a new blaze broke out near Yellowstone National Park and forced the evacuation of up to 150 homes.

There were concerns the entire town of Red Lodge, a resort community in south-central Montana, might have to be evacuated in the face of the blaze, which was pushed along by winds expected to reach 30 mph overnight.

"We're constantly reevaluating whether there will be a need to evacuate the town," population 1,875, a Forest Service official said Sunday.

No other major flare-ups were reported Sunday in the state, where more than 10,000 firefighters worked to combat 23 wildfires that have consumed some 670,000 acres.

"Everything stayed about the same," said Dan Kincaid, information officer for a fire burning between Helena and Bozeman that has turned more than 84,000 acres to ash.

Whether fire crews were in fact able to hold their own Sunday may not be known until Monday morning when officials get their next look at aerial infrared photos that accurately map the fires' boundaries at night.

"I have a feeling that we'll discover that some of the fires have increased dramatically," said E.Lynn Burkett of the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. "There's so many elements out there working against us — steep canyons, winds that make fires run."

Hundreds of soldiers from Fort Hood in Central Texas have been helping to cut a fire line in advance of the 41,000-acre Burgdorf Junction blaze at Payette National Forest in central Idaho.

But soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division were scheduled to return Monday to Fort Hood, the largest Army post in the free world, from fighting Idaho wildfires.

About 560 soldiers from the 20th Engineer Battalion of the 1st Cavalry Division had joined another group from Texas earlier this month in the Northern Rockies.

Twenty-five military squads and three civilian fire crews were assigned to the Burgdorf Junction fire.

Elsewhere, a fire burning out of control in South Dakota's Black Hills National Forest might have been set, a U.S. Forest Service official said Sunday night at a town meeting.

"It probably is human-caused, possibly arson," said Mike Lloyd, of the U.S. Forest Service. The fire has burned an estimated 62,000 acres.

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