

**WHATCOM COUNTY
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To : Criminal Justice Officials and Local Media
From : Bill Elfo, Sheriff *Bill Elfo*
Date : October 15, 2009
Subject : Revision of Jail Visiting Hours

Sheriff Bill Elfo announced an expansion of the suspension of jail standards as applied to jail visitation policies. The suspension of the jail standards has been in effect for years. The new revision will result in a reduction in the frequency and length of visits most inmates are eligible to receive from family and friends. A County Ordinance enacted in 1987 governs jail visitation policies and entitles most inmates to receive three hours of visitation per week. The ordinance provides that standards are suspended when the average daily population exceeds capacity. The jail has exceeded its population capacity for decades. The change will not affect constitutionally mandated attorney-client and other legally required visitation.

Sheriff Elfo said that a number of factors necessitated this action:

- The jail has experienced increased levels of overcrowding and a higher number of violent and disruptive inmates. This has resulted in an increase in the number of "inmate on inmate" and "inmate on staff" assaults and required an increased emphasis on factors directly affecting security and safety within the facility;
- Critical systems and infrastructure in the Main Jail are frequently failing necessitating deputies to operate systems manually, increase inspections and place additional emphasis on factors directly related to safety and security;
- The County hiring freeze extends to a recently vacated civilian position in the jail that processes visitors and runs the public lobby window. Furloughs are anticipated to further reduce the amount of civilian staff time available to coordinate visitation. With the unavailability of civilian employees to perform this function, deputies would need to be pulled from the cell areas and taken away from their primary role of ensuring the safety and security of the facility.

Sheriff Elfo said: "Visitation is an important element in assisting inmates in maintaining family ties and successfully reintegrating into the community. It also helps reduce tensions in a very overcrowded facility. However, the overriding concern

here in light of resource and facility limitations, is the need to address imminent and critical issues affecting the immediate safety of inmates and staff.”

Effective November 1st, most inmates will be eligible for one hour of visitation per week. Evening visitation, which currently occurs four nights per week, will be temporarily eliminated. Visitation will be assigned on a “first come, first serve basis.” The Revised Visiting Hours are as follows:

Saturdays:

8:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.: Third Floor and 1st Floor, All Women

1:00 P.M. TO 4:00 P.M.: Second Floor, Units 2A, 2B & 2C

Sundays:

8:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.: Second Floor, Units 2D, 2E & 2F

1:00 P.M. TO 4:00 P.M.: Third Floor and 1st Floor, All Women

Inmate Kitchen Workers: Visitation at any of the above hours in which the kitchen inmate worker is not scheduled to work.

The hours of operation of the reception and “public window” in the jail will also be reduced and shall be as follows:

Monday through Friday

8 A.M. to 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM to 4:30 PM

Saturdays and Sundays:

Same as visiting hours

The Main Jail was originally built to house 148 inmates. Following some limited remodeling, the operational capacity is rated at 212 inmates. Over the past year, the main jail population has regularly exceeded 280 inmates and has reached populations of well over 300 inmates.

The above action will not affect visitation our hours of operation at the minimum security Jail Alternative Work Center.