

Supermax prisons



United States Penitentiary, Florence ADX is the only facility housing supermax units operating in the Federal Bureau of Prisons

Supermax (short for "super-maximum security") is the name used to describe "control-unit" prisons, or units within prisons, which represent the most secure levels of custody in the prison systems of certain countries. The objective is to provide long term, segregated housing for inmates classified as the highest security risks in the prison system—the "worst of the worst" criminals, and those who pose a threat to national and international security.^[1]

Characteristics

According to the National Institute of Corrections, "A supermax is a stand-alone unit or part of another facility and is designated for violent or disruptive inmates. It typically involves up to 23-hour-per-day, single-cell confinement for an indefinite period of time. Inmates in supermax housing have minimal contact with staff and other inmates." This definition is confirmed by a large majority of prison wardens.^[2]

Leena Kurki and Norval Morris have argued there is no absolute definition of a supermax, and that different jurisdictions classify prisons as supermax inconsistently. They identify four general features that tend to characterize supermax prisons:^[3]

1. Long-term – Once transferred to a supermax prison, people tend to stay there for years or indefinitely.
2. Powerful administration – Supermax administrators and guards have ample authority to punish and manage inmates, without outside review or prisoner grievance systems.
3. Solitary confinement – Supermax prisons rely heavily on intensive (and long-term) solitary confinement, tantamount^[citation needed] to sensory deprivation, which is used to isolate and punish prisoners as well as to protect them from themselves and each other. Communication with outsiders is minimal.
4. No activities – Few opportunities are provided for recreation, education, substance abuse programs, or other activities generally considered healthy and rehabilitative at other prisons.

In supermax, prisoners are generally allowed out of their cells for only one hour a day (in California state prisons they are allowed out for one-and-a-half hours); often they are kept in solitary confinement. They receive their meals through ports, also known as "chuck holes" or "bean slots," in the doors of their cells. When supermax inmates are allowed to exercise, this may take place in a small, enclosed area where the prisoner will exercise alone.^[4]

Prisoners are under constant surveillance, usually with closed-circuit television cameras. Cell doors are usually opaque, while the cells may be windowless. Conditions are plain, with poured concrete or metal furniture common. Cell walls, and sometimes plumbing, may be soundproofed to prevent communication between the inmates.^[citation needed]

History



Alcatraz Island is a historical prototype of the supermax prison standard.

The United States Penitentiary Alcatraz Island, opened in 1934, has been considered a prototype and early standard for a supermax prison.^[5]

An early form of supermax-style prison unit appeared in Australia in 1975, when "Katingal" was built inside the Long Bay Correctional Centre in Sydney. Dubbed the "electronic zoo" by inmates, Katingal was a super-maximum security prison block with 40 prison cells having electronically operated doors, surveillance cameras, and no windows. It was closed down two years later over human rights concerns.^[6] Since then, some maximum-security prisons have gone to full lockdown as well, while others have been built and dedicated to the supermax standard.

Supermax prisons began to proliferate within the United States after 1984. Prior to 1984 only one prison in the US met "supermax" standards: the Federal Penitentiary in Marion, Illinois. By 1999, the United States contained at least 57 supermax facilities, spread across 30–34 states.^[3] The push for this type of prison came after two correctional officers at Marion, Merle Clutts and Robert Hoffman, were stabbed to death in two separate incidents by inmates Thomas Silverstein and Clayton Fountain. This prompted Norman Carlson, director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, to call for a new type of prison to isolate uncontrollable inmates. In Carlson's view, such a prison was the only way to deal with inmates who "show absolutely no concern for human life."^[7]

The Federal Bureau of Prisons' solitary confinement units are known as Special Housing Units (SHU).^[8]

In recent years a number of US states have downgraded their supermax prisons,^[citation needed] as has been done with Wallens Ridge State Prison, a former supermax prison in Big Stone Gap.

Virginia. Other supermax prisons that have gained notoriety for their harsh conditions and attendant litigation by inmates and advocates are the former Boscobel (in Wisconsin), now named the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility, Red Onion State Prison (in Western Virginia, the twin to Wallens Ridge State Prison), Tamms (in Illinois), and the Ohio State Penitentiary. Placement policies at the Ohio facility were recently the subject of a U.S. Supreme Court case (Wilkinson v. Austin)^[9] where the Court decided that there had to be some, but only very limited, due process involved in supermax placement.

There is only one supermax prison in the United States federal system, ADX Florence in Florence, Colorado.^[10] It houses several inmates who have a history of violent behavior in other prisons, with the goal of moving them from solitary confinement for 23 hours a day to a less restrictive prison within three years. However, it is best known for housing several inmates who have been deemed either too dangerous, too high-profile or too great a national security risk for even a maximum-security prison.^[7] Residents include Theodore Kaczynski, a domestic terrorist otherwise known as the Unabomber, who once attacked via mail bombs; Robert Hanssen, an American FBI Agent turned Soviet spy; Terry Nichols, an accomplice to the Oklahoma City bombing; Richard Reid, known as the "Shoe Bomber", who was jailed for life for attempting to detonate explosive materials in his shoes while on board an aircraft;^[11] and Vito Rizzuto, boss of the "Sixth" Mafia "Family", released on October 5, 2012. ^[12]

However, many states now have created supermax prisons, either as stand-alone facilities or as secure units within lower-security prisons.^[13] State supermax prisons include Pelican Bay in California and Tamms in Illinois. The USP in Marion, Illinois was recently downgraded to a medium-security facility. Some facilities such as California State Prison, Corcoran (COR) are hybrids incorporating a supermax partition, housing high security prisoners such as Charles Manson.

In September 2001, the Australian state of New South Wales opened a facility in the Goulburn Correctional Centre to the supermax standard. While its condition is an improvement over that of Katingal of the 1970s, this new facility is nonetheless designed on the same principle of sensory deprivation.^{[14][15]} It has been set up for 'AA' prisoners who are deemed a risk to public safety and the instruments of government and civil order, or believed to be beyond rehabilitation. Corrections Victoria in the state of Victoria also operates the Acacia and Maleuca units at Barwon Prison which serve to hold the prisoners requiring the highest security in that state including Melbourne Gangland figures such as Tony Mokbel and Carl Williams, who was murdered in the Acacia unit in 2010.

Controversy

Supermax and Security Housing Unit (SHU) prisons are controversial; some claim^[16] that the living conditions in such facilities violate the United States Constitution, specifically, the Eighth Amendment's proscription against "cruel and unusual" punishments. In 1996, a United Nations team assigned to investigate torture described SHU conditions as "inhuman and degrading."^[17] A 2011 New York Bar association comprehensive study suggested that supermax prisons constitute "torture under international law" and "cruel and unusual punishment under the U.S. Constitution."^[18] In 2012, a federal class action suit against the Federal Bureau of Prisons and officials who run ADX Florence SHU (Bacote v. Federal Bureau of Prisons, Civil Action 1:12-cv-01570) alleged chronic abuse, failure to properly diagnose and neglect of prisoners who are seriously mentally ill.^[19]

The U.S. government houses a number of convicted terrorists, gang leaders, spies, and similar prisoners in a supermax prison known as ADMAX, the Federal administrative maximum security prison in Florence, Colorado, west of Pueblo.

Prisons with supermax facilities

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Allan B. Polunsky Unit houses State of Texas supermax units



Mississippi State Penitentiary houses State of Mississippi supermax units

This list is incomplete; you can help by expanding it.

Most of these facilities only contain supermax wings or sections, with other parts of the facility under lesser security measures.

- Alabama
 - Holman Correctional Facility - Atmore, Alabama
- Arizona
 - ASPC-Eyman, SMU I - Florence, Arizona
 - ASPC-Eyman, Browning Unit (Previously SMU II) - Florence, Arizona
 - United States Penitentiary - Tucson, Arizona
- Arkansas
 - Varner Supermax - Lincoln County, Arkansas
- California
 - United States Penitentiary - Atwater, California
 - California State Prison, Corcoran - Corcoran, California
 - Pelican Bay State Prison - Crescent City, California

- Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary - San Francisco, California (Closed March 21, 1963)
 - California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi, California
- Colorado
 - Colorado State Penitentiary - Cañon City, Colorado
 - U.S. Penitentiary Florence ADMAX (Administrative Maximum) Facility - Florence, Colorado (entirely supermax)
- Connecticut
 - Northern Correctional Institution - Somers, Connecticut
- Florida
 - United States Penitentiary - Coleman, Florida
 - Florida State Prison - Raiford, Florida
- Georgia
 - United States Penitentiary - Atlanta, Georgia
- Idaho
 - Idaho Maximum Security Institution - Boise, Idaho
- Illinois
 - United States Penitentiary - Marion, Illinois (Downgraded to a medium-security facility in September 2006)^[20]
 - Tamms Correctional Center - Tamms, Illinois (Closed January 2013)
- Indiana
 - Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, SHU - Carlisle, Indiana
 - United States Penitentiary - Terre Haute, Indiana
 - Westville Correctional Facility, WCU - Westville, Indiana
- Kansas
 - United States Disciplinary Barracks - Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (military prison)
 - United States Penitentiary - Leavenworth, Kansas (being downgraded to medium security)
 - El Dorado Correctional Facility - El Dorado, Kansas
- Kentucky
 - Kentucky State Penitentiary - Eddyville, Kentucky (the only prison in Kentucky housing supermax units)
- Louisiana
 - Louisiana State Penitentiary - West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana
 - United States Penitentiary Pollock
- Maine
 - Maine State Prison - Warren, Maine
- Maryland
 - Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center - Baltimore, Maryland
 - North Branch Correctional Institution - Cumberland, Maryland (final housing unit will begin operation in summer of 2008)
- Massachusetts
 - Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center- Shirley, Massachusetts
 - Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Cedar Junction - Walpole, Massachusetts
- Minnesota
 - Minnesota Correctional Facility Oak Park Heights - Stillwater, Minnesota
- Mississippi
 - Mississippi State Penitentiary - Sunflower County, Mississippi (Unit 32)^[21]
- Missouri
 - Jefferson City Correctional Center - Jefferson City, Missouri
- New Hampshire

- New Hampshire State Prison - Men - Concord, New Hampshire
- New Jersey
 - New Jersey State Prison - Trenton, New Jersey
 - East Jersey State Prison (Rahway) - Woodbridge, New Jersey
 - Northern State Prison - Newark, New Jersey
 - Essex County Correctional Facility - Newark, New Jersey
- New Mexico
 - Penitentiary of New Mexico - unincorporated Santa Fe County, New Mexico - Uses the Bureau Classification System - Level 6 being Supermax
- New York
 - Attica Correctional Facility-Attica, New York
 - Upstate Correctional Facility - Malone, New York
 - Sing Sing Correctional Facility - Ossining, New York
 - Southport Correctional Facility - (disciplinary supermax prison with only solitary confinement), Pine City, New York
- Ohio
 - Ohio State Penitentiary - Youngstown, Ohio
- Oklahoma
 - Oklahoma State Penitentiary - McAlester, Oklahoma
- Oregon
 - Oregon State Penitentiary - Salem, Oregon
- Pennsylvania
 - United States Penitentiary - Allenwood, Pennsylvania
 - United States Penitentiary - Lewisburg, Pennsylvania
 - State Correctional Institution Greene - Waynesburg, Pennsylvania
- Tennessee
 - Riverbend Maximum Security Institution - Nashville, Tennessee
- Texas
 - United States Penitentiary - Jefferson County, Texas^[citation needed]
 - Estelle High Security Unit - W.J. Estelle Unit - Walker County, Texas^[22]
 - Allan B. Polunsky Unit (formerly Terrell Unit) - West Livingston, Texas^[23]
- Utah
 - Utah State Prison - Draper, Utah
- Virginia
 - Wallens Ridge State Prison - Big Stone Gap, Virginia
 - Red Onion State Prison - Wise County, Virginia
- West Virginia
 - Mt. Olive Correctional Complex - Fayette County, West Virginia
- Wisconsin
 - Wisconsin Secure Program Facility - Boscobel, Wisconsin

Canada

- Edmonton Institution - Edmonton, Alberta - Canadian Prairie Region Maximum Security Prison
- Millhaven Institution (Bath, Ontario, Canada) - Houses non-Canadian citizens being held by Security certificates and those considered "the worst of the worst".
- Kingston Penitentiary (Kingston, Ontario, Canada)
- Special Handling Unit (Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, Quebec) - Maximum Security Prison, with a supermax wing - Houses Canada's most dangerous and violent inmates.
- Kent Institution - British Columbia - Pacific Region Maximum Security Institution

Mexico

- Penal del Altiplano - Almoloya de Juarez, State of Mexico. Full Supermax and the only facility of this kind in Mexico.

South America

Brazil

In Brazil, the "*regime disciplinar diferenciado*" (differentiated disciplinary regime), known by the acronym RDD, and strongly based on the Supermax standard, was created primarily to handle inmates who are considered capable of continuing to run their crime syndicate or to order criminal actions from within the prison system, when confined in normal maximum security prisons that allow contact with other inmates. Since its inception, the following prisons were prepared for the housing of RDD inmates:

- Centro de Readaptação Provisória de Presidente Bernardes (Presidente Bernardes, São Paulo, Brazil) - inspired by the supermax standards, although prisoners can only stay there for a maximum of 2 years. Is a part of the prison system of the Brazilian State of São Paulo.
- Penitenciária Federal de Catanduvas (Catanduvas, Paraná, Brazil) - also based on the supermax standards. It is the first federal prison in Brazil, designed to receive prisoners deemed too dangerous to be kept in the states' prison systems (in Brazil, ordinarily, both convicts sentenced by States' courts or by the Federal Judiciary fulfill their prison terms in state-run prisons; the Federal Prison System was created to handle only the most dangerous prisoners in Brazil, such as major drug lords, convicted either by the Federal Judiciary or by the judiciary of a state).
- Penitenciária Federal de Campo Grande (Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil) - the second of two Brazilian Federal prisons based on the supermax specifications.

Colombia

- Penitenciaría de Cóbbita (Colombia) - follows supermax specifications, hosts terrorists and drug lords.

Europe

- Portlaoise Prison (Portlaoise, Ireland) - One of the most secure prisons in Europe, protected full time by members of the Irish Defence Forces. Held many convicted IRA prisoners.
- Nieuw Vosseveld - Dutch High Security prison in Vught
- Stammheim Prison - German High Security Prison, partly purpose-built to keep Red Army Faction terrorists in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Politigårdens Fængsel - (Copenhagen - Denmark) There are 25 maximum security cells located in the prison of the central police station of Copenhagen
- Østjyllands Statsfængsel - (Horsens - Denmark) - High Security Prison. Holds many of Denmark's most dangerous criminals.
- Kumla Prison, Sweden - Have security cells called "Fenix".

United Kingdom

- Her Majesty's Prison Belmarsh - London, England, United Kingdom - many of the alleged terrorists of the 2006 transatlantic aircraft plot are imprisoned there.
- Her Majesty's Prison Frankland - Durham, England, United Kingdom - High Security Prison with a special unit for prisoners suffering from Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorders.
- Her Majesty's Prison Full Sutton - York, England, United Kingdom - High Security Prison.
- Her Majesty's Prison Long Lartin - Worcestershire, England, United Kingdom - High Security Prison.
- Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry - Lisburn, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom - High Security Prison
- Her Majesty's Prison Manchester - Strangeways, Manchester, England, United Kingdom - High Security Prison.
- Her Majesty's Prison Shotts - Scotland - High Security Prison. Holds some of the UK's most dangerous and violent criminals.
- Her Majesty's Prison Whitemoor - March, Cambridgeshire, England, United Kingdom - houses up to 500 of the most dangerous criminals in the UK. It has a unit known as the 'Close Supervision Centre' which is referred to as a "Prison inside a Prison". It has a special unit for prisoners with Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorders.
- Her Majesty's Prison Wakefield - Wakefield, England, United Kingdom - High Security Prison with a Close Supervision Centre
- Her Majesty's Prison Woodhill - Milton Keynes, England, United Kingdom - High Security Prison with a specialist 'Close Supervision Centre'.

Africa

- C Max (Pretoria, South Africa) - for violent and disruptive prisoners.

Asia

- KEMTA, Taiping, Perak Malaysia
- Al Hayer Prison (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia)
- Black Dolphin Prison - Russian maximum-security prison for convicts sentenced to life imprisonment.
- White Swan - Russian maximum-security prison for convicts sentenced to life imprisonment.
- Al-Muwaqqar II Correctional and Rehabilitation Center is a super maximum security prison with 240 cells in Jordan, see also Correction centers in Jordan. It is designed to hold incorrigibly violent inmates in separate isolation cells.

Australia

- Goulburn Correctional Centre – High Risk Management Correctional Centre (HRMCC) – 75 bed centre, (Goulburn, New South Wales).^[14]
- Casuarina Prison – Special Handling Unit (SHU) (Perth, Western Australia)
- Risdon Prison – Wilfred Lopes Centre (Risdon Vale, Tasmania)
- Barwon Prison – Barwon Supermax (Lara, Victoria)
- Port Phillip Prison – Charlotte unit (Laverton, Victoria)
- Brisbane Correctional Centre – 18-cell Maximum Security Unit (Brisbane, Queensland)
- Alexander Maconochie Centre – 12-cell Supermax Section (Hume, Australian Capital Territory)

- [Yatala Labour Prison – G Division \(Northfield, South Australia\)](#)
- [Alice Springs Correctional Centre – 12-cell Supermax Unit \(Alice Springs, Northern Territory\)](#)

Total lockdown: Stunning aerial shots reveal layout of vast super-max prison that's so tough a female inmate 'roasted to death' in an outdoor cell

A series of stunning aerial shots have revealed the layout of a vast maximum security prison, one of many facilities springing up across the U.S. to cope with booming numbers of inmates.

Photographer Christoph Gielen has captured supermax lockdown facilities over the past two years for his ongoing project 'American Prison Perspectives'.

America's prison system is at breaking point - with overcrowding in the nation's jails at its highest in eight years.



Lock down: Photographer Christoph Gielen captured this Arizona supermax prison from the air as more of the vast structures appear across the U.S. to deal with a booming number of inmates



What lies beneath: Photographer Christoph Gielen shoots the Perryville State Prison complex as part of his long-running supermax prison project

There are currently more than two million Americans behind bars. The worst hit state is California which houses 140,000 inmates when its 33 adult prisons are only designed to hold a maximum of 80,000.

Gielen, along with a Canadian cultural historian Michael Prokopow, took a closer look at the geometric designs of these huge structures, according to **Creative Time Reports**.

In 2010, the photographer shot Perryville State Prison complex in Arizona while flying overhead in a helicopter.

He had originally wanted to find out the difference between the designs of prisons and residential neighborhoods - but became focused on the psychological and social implications of the facilities on those kept behind its walls.

The geometric design of the prison with exercise yards at the end of buildings keeps the prison population divided - and easier to control.



Nowhere to run: The geometrical design of the super-max prison in the arid Arizona land is created for maximum security for highly dangerous criminals



Lucrative: Massive prison complexes are a growing industry in the U.S. as the inmate population soars above two million



Consequences: The photographer's series brings into question the social and psychological implications of housing prisoners in such inhospitable structures

The Arizona prison is particularly notorious after a female inmate 'roasted to death' in an uncovered outdoor cell in 42C temperatures in 2009.

Marcia Powell, 48, died from heat-related complications after being placed in a cage in the middle of the Perryville State Prison yard while waiting to be moved to a psychiatric unit.

The maximum time prisoners are meant to be left in the chain-link fence cell is two hours.

Miss Powell, a convicted prostitute with mental problems, was interred for four hours before being found unconscious and taken to hospital.

As she had no known kin, state prison director Charles Ryan took the decision to have her life support machine turned off.

It later emerged that prison guards were just 20 yards away while Miss Powell, who had been serving a 27-month sentence for prostitution, was in the cell.

Prison director Ryan said Miss Powell's death was 'a tragedy and a failure'.



Isolation: The prison complexes are designed to keep inmates in small groups



© Christoph Gielen

Study: The photographer looks out over the Arizona prison which has limited access for those not incarcerated

Top 10 High-Security Prisons in the World



Where do you send the most notorious criminals in the world? Drug lords, terrorists, serial murderers, rapists and child molesters are the absolute worst of the worst. Special arrangements must be undertaken to ensure that they remain behind bars and that they do not escape to rejoin society.

This is where supermax high-security prisons come in. This kind of prison ensures that the most dangerous criminals are segregated on a long-term basis. By keeping them inside, authorities ensure that they do not pose a threat to security and the peace and order situation anymore.

Here is a list of the top 10 high-security prisons in the world. Conditions may be like hell, which is probably appropriate given the people who live in it.

10. Qincheng Prison, China



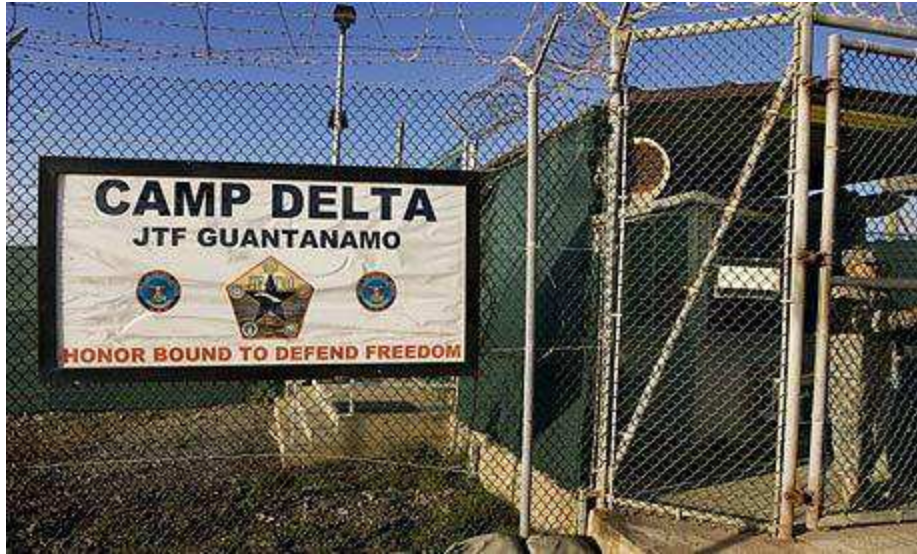
Qincheng Prison is a maximum-security prison in China that has one of the highest watchtowers in the world. Up to 5,000 security personnel ensure that the prisoners are kept locked in at all times. To add to its security, the prison is located 3,000 feet above sea level. A deep and desolate valley awaits those who plan to escape. Chinese authorities have also set up modern surveillance cameras and electronic equipment.

9. Tadmor Military Prison, Syria



How do you escape a prison that has practically no ground access gate to the outside world? That is how secure Tadmor Military Prison is. The only access to the facility is through an underground tunnel. One has to crawl to get in or out. There are laser beams deployed to ensure that the foolhardy that does try to escape will not succeed. Once inside, prisoners are tied up in heavy chains. Conditions are harsh and even inhumane, with prisoners getting beaten up regularly with metal rods. Executions also happen on a massive scale. The sad part is that not all the prisoners are actually criminals. Some are incarcerated simply because they oppose the Syrian government.

8. Camp Delta, United States



Camp Delta is a prison facility in Guantanamo Bay. It is located in Cuba, though it officially belongs to the United States. The prison was used to house suspected terrorists in the fight against Al Qaeda.



Torture was performed regularly in the past, though this has been cut down and even eliminated totally. Up to 12 guards may be assigned to one prisoner. And even if the prisoner manages to escape, there is the added obstacle in the fact that he would be escaping into an American military base. The border with Cuba is heavily fortified while crossing the sea will lead to Florida.

7. Fuchu Prison, Japan



Fuchu Prison is the largest prison facility in Japan. It is equipped with the latest surveillance gadgets and state-of-the-art equipment to ensure that prisoners are kept inside.



Any small sign of a missing prisoner will trigger off one of the most advanced emergency alert system in the world.

6. Arthur Road Jail, India



Arthur Road Jail is located in the city of Mumbai. Its cells are highly secure and built sturdily to withstand both break ins and escapes.



It claims to be bomb-proof and that not even the most advanced weapons in the arsenal can break the walls and barriers of the prison. No one has ever escaped from this prison and it is highly doubtful if there is anyone foolish enough to try to break into it.

5. Souza Baranowski Center, United States



Souza Baranowski Center is a prison facility located in Massachusetts. A team from the world-renowned institution of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or MIT, developed the prison's surveillance system. The team built a highly advanced camera matrix system that is able to record 24 hours a day every conceivable angle in the facility.



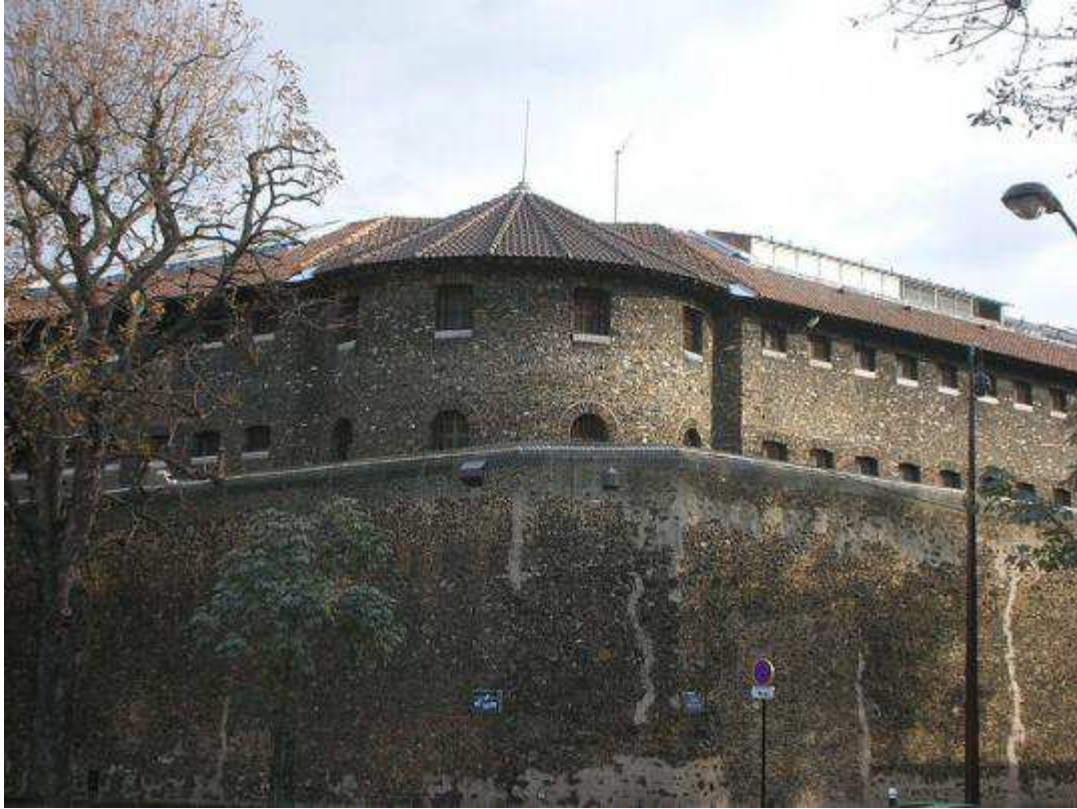
The doors are controlled electronically and are locked automatically. Even the perimeter of the facility is monitored and watched closely 24 hours a day. In other words, it has built a Big Brother type system that can watch the prisoners at all times anywhere.

4. Federal Correctional Complex (Terre Haute), United States



The Federal Correctional Complex in Indiana is a maximum-security prison that employs only a minimal number of guards. Electronic surveillance is done throughout this prison facility. Surveillance cameras afford a 360-degree view. These are monitored constantly in a control room. There are also motion detector sensors strategically located all over the prison. There is also a face detection technology to help identify the inmates. As if this was not enough, each prisoner's cell has a biometric lock. It is said to be the most high tech prison in the world.

3. La Sante Prison, France

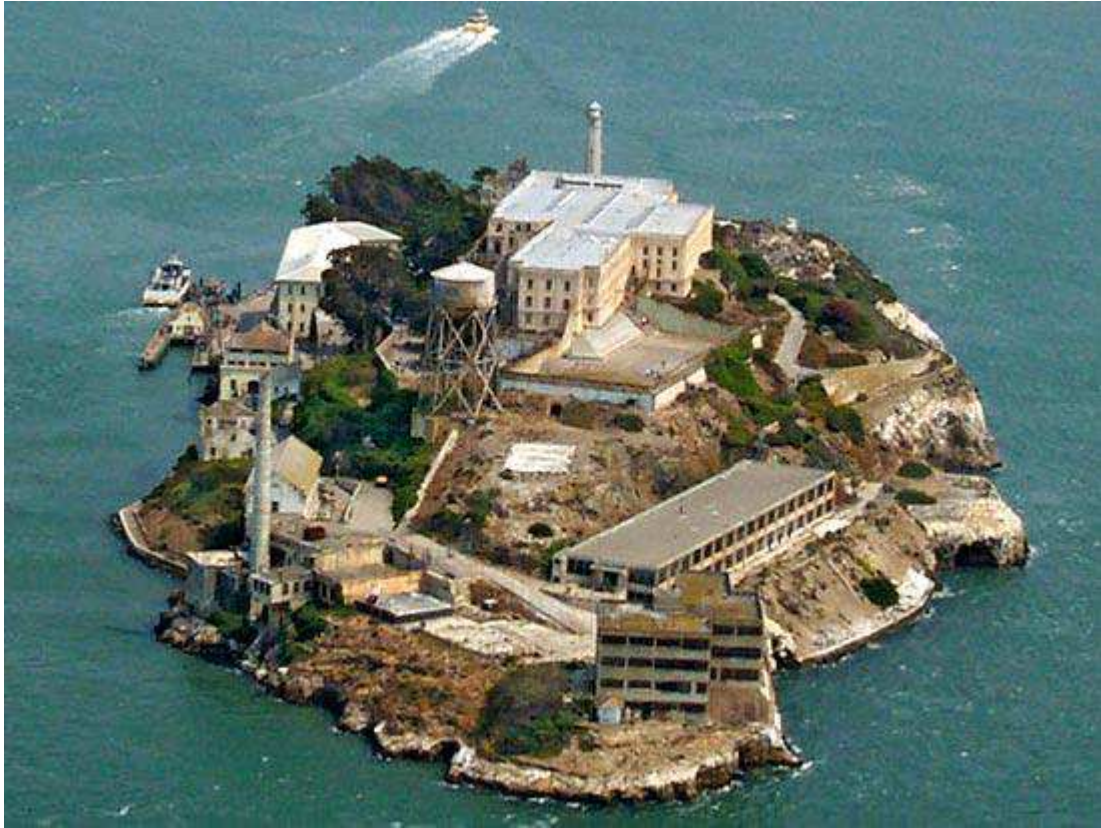


La Sante Prison in Paris is an inescapable facility and hundreds of prisoners had to find this out the hard way.

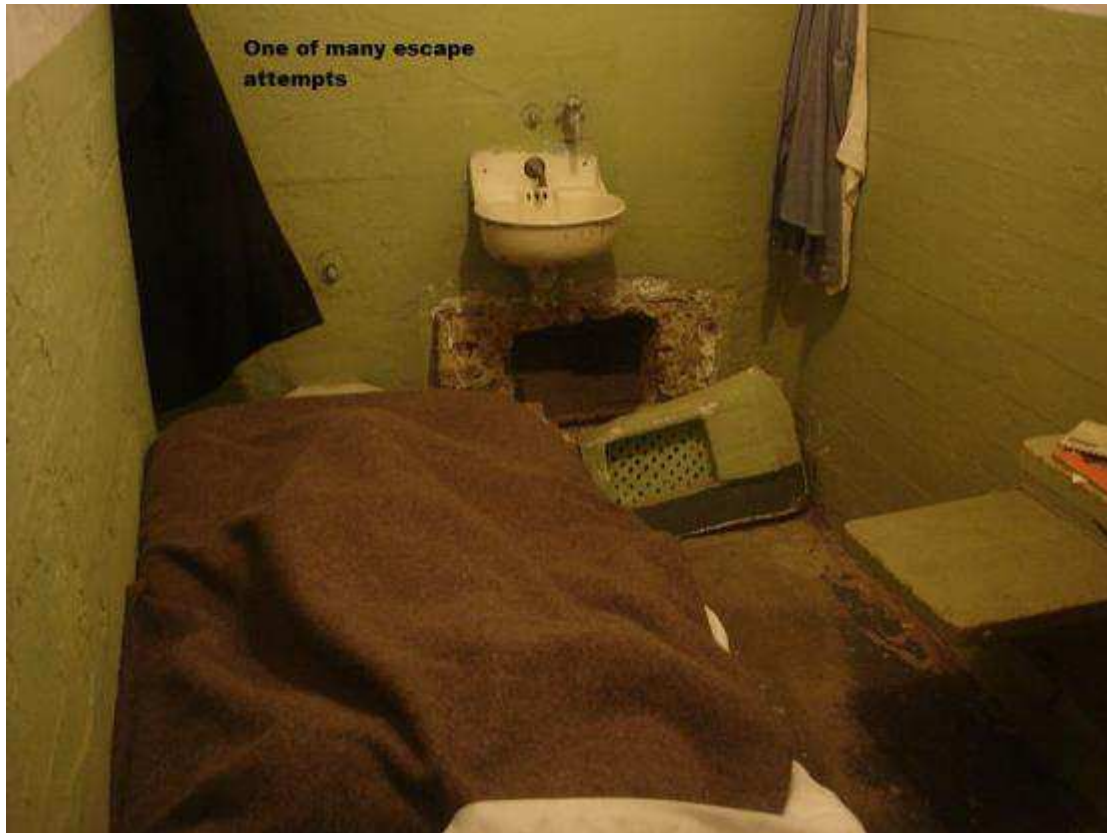


Several years ago, a group of prisoners tried to escape from the facility by going through the drainage system. Even that part of the facility proved to be so secure that the prisoners ended up getting trapped in the tunnel. As a result, most suffocated to death.

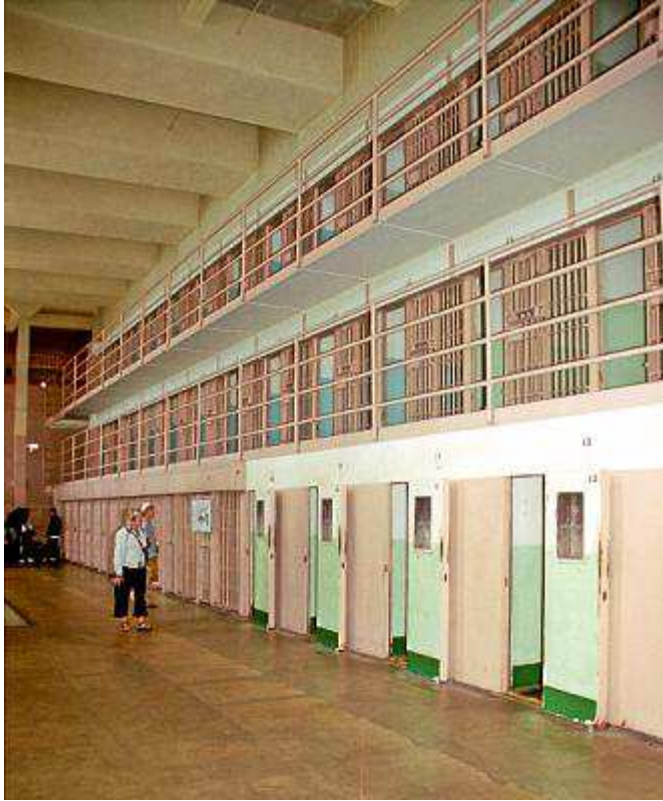
2. Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary, United States



This prison actually closed down in 1963, but its legend lives on because of its seemingly fortress status. America's most notorious criminals stayed there, including Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, Rafael Miranda and Whitey Bulger.

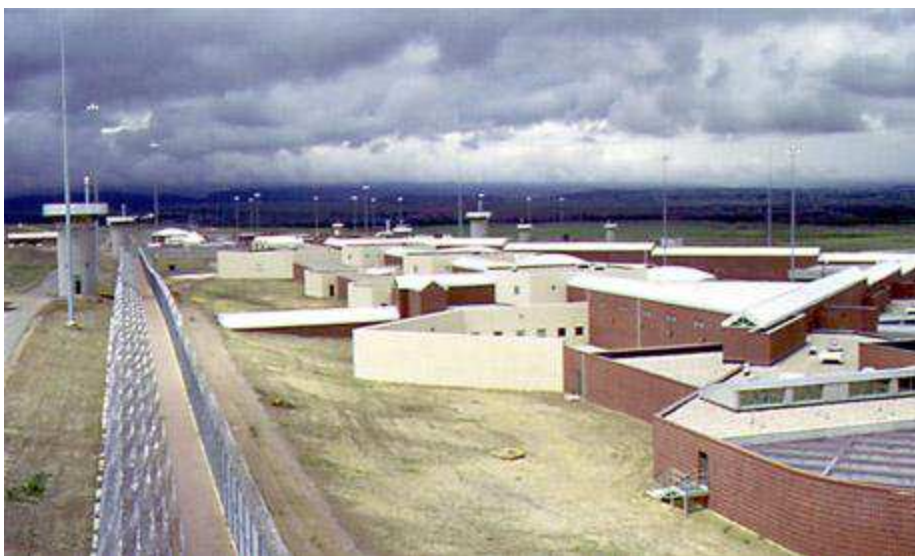


There were 14 escape attempts made by 36 prisoners, of which only five were unaccounted for and are presumed to have died by drowning.



The prison was located in an island and escape from it meant having to swim 1.5 miles to the nearest mainland shore. It closed down as salt water kept eroding the buildings and San Francisco residents expressed concern over the sewage that the prisoners and the prison officers' families were dumping into the sea.

1. ADX Florence, United States

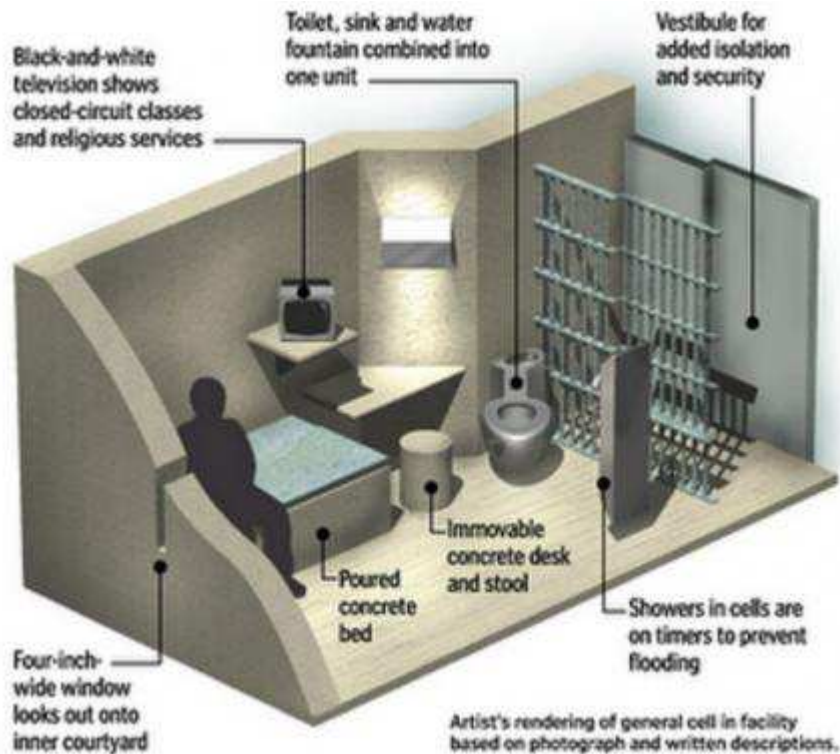




Located in Colorado, this is the most secure prison in the world. Prisoners are kept in their cells the whole day.



No direct access is provided to the cells.



Security is multi-tiered and prisoners would be lucky to get even a glimpse of the sun during their incarceration.

An American Gulag: Descending into Madness at Supermax

ANDREW COHEN JUN 18 2012, 2:10 PM ET

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A detailed new federal lawsuit alleges chronic abuse and neglect of mentally ill prisoners at America's most famous prison. (First in a three-part series.)



Index of Photographic Exhibits to Plaintiffs' Complaint, Bacote, et al v. United States Bureau of Prisons, et al

When Jack Powers arrived at maximum-security federal prison in Atlanta in 1990 after a bank robbery conviction, he had never displayed symptoms of or been treated for mental illness. Still in custody a few years later, he witnessed three inmates, believed to be members of the Aryan Brotherhood gang, kill another inmate. Powers tried to help the victim get medical attention, and was quickly transferred to a segregated unit for his safety, but it didn't stop the gang's members from quickly threatening him.

Not then. And certainly not after Powers testified (not once but twice) for the federal government against the assailants. The threats against him continued and Powers was soon transferred to a federal prison in Pennsylvania, where he was threatened even after he was put into protective custody. By this time, Powers had developed insomnia and anxiety attacks and was diagnosed by a prison psychologist as suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.



Above: Jack Powers

Instead of giving Powers medicine, or proper mental health therapy, officials transferred him yet again, this time to another federal prison in New Jersey. There, Powers was informed by officials that he would be removed from a witness protection program and transferred back into the prison's general population. Fearing for his life, Powers escaped. When he was recaptured two days later he was sent to ADX-Florence, part of a sprawling prison complex near Florence, Colorado often referred to as "ADX" or Supermax, "America's most famous and secure federal prison.

From there, things got worse. The Supermax complex, made up of different secure prison units and facilities, is laden with members of the Brotherhood and Powers was no safer than he had been anywhere else. Over and over again he was threatened at the Colorado prison. Over and over again he injured or mutilated himself in response. Over and over again he was transferred to federal government's special mental health prison facility in Missouri, diagnosed with PTSD, and given medication. Over and over again that medication was taken away when he came back to Supermax.

As he sits today in Supermax, Powers had amputated his fingers, a testicle, his scrotum and his earlobes, has cut his Achilles tendon, and had tried several times to kill himself. Those tattoos you see? Powers had none until 2009, when he started mutilating with a razor and carbon paper. He did much of this -- including biting off his pinkie and cutting skin off his face -- in the Control Unit at ADX while prison officials consistently refused to treat his diagnosed mental illness. Rules are rules, prison officials told him, and no prisoners in that unit were to be given psychotropic medicine no matter how badly they needed it.

CALL AND RESPONSE

If the Powers case were unique it would be shocking enough. Bureau of Prison policies prohibit officials from assigning mentally ill inmates to ADX. And the Eighth Amendment requires prison staff everywhere to adequately diagnose and treat mentally ill prisoners, including those prisoners, like Powers, who evidently become mentally ill while in prison. No law or policy, at any level, would appear to sanction or condone the conduct of those prison officials accountable for the lack of response to Powers' decline.

For these inmates, the prison is a Gulag, a place of unspeakable cruelty and state-sponsored wickedness,

But Powers is not an exception. In federal court in Denver this morning, a new class-action lawsuit was filed against the Bureau of Prisons and the officials in charge of Supermax. The long, detailed complaint, which reads at times like the plot from HBO's *Oz*, alleges not just "deliberate indifference" on the part of those officials but outright cruelty -- even torture -- in the face of obvious cases of mental illness at the prison. You can read the complaint in its entirety [here](#). The very first paragraph of the pleading states plainly the case:

Currently, BOP [Bureau of Prisons] turns a blind eye to the needs of the mentally ill at ADX and to deplorable conditions of confinement that are injurious, callous and inhumane to those prisoners. No civilized society treats its mentally disabled citizens with a comparable level of deliberate indifference to their plight.

Paragraph 5 of the complaint alleges in more detail:

Prisoners interminably wail, scream and bang on the walls of their cells. Some mutilate their bodies with razors, shards of glass, writing utensils and whatever other objects they can obtain. Some swallow razor blades, nail clippers, parts of radios and televisions, broken glass and other dangerous objects. Others carry on delusional conversations with voices they hear in their heads, oblivious to the reality and the danger that such behavior might pose to themselves and anyone who interacts with them.

There are five named prisoners in the lawsuit (about whom we'll have more detail in the next installment of this series), and its likely that at least six other inmates named in the complaint, and perhaps many more, will soon join the litigation. It's certain that this case will be closely followed around the country because of what it portends for other lawsuits challenging dubious prison isolation policies. The lawsuit does not request money damages. Instead, it seeks an injunction that would require prison officials to better treat the ill men in their care.

And just exactly who are the plaintiffs? Who are these convicted felons seeking redress in federal court? All of them came to Supermax because of violent run-ins at other federal prisons or other parts of the sprawling ADX complex in Florence, Colorado (some of those incidents themselves were a manifestation of their mental illness). One plaintiff got to the control unit at Supermax after he assaulted a prison chaplain. Another, who is likely mentally retarded, pleaded guilty to

murdering another inmate. These men are hardly noble. But the Eighth Amendment doesn't require them to be. From paragraph 7 of the complaint:

Plaintiffs are five seriously mentally ill men currently incarcerated at ADX. This Complaint also names as "Interested Individuals" six other current ADX prisoners with serious mental illnesses. ... Many of these men also suffer severe functional impairment of their ability to attend to their own personal needs or even to exist in a world with other people. Several of them are mentally retarded, and at least one is functionally illiterate.

Many of these men aren't serving life sentences. Some will soon be released after going mad in prison, after having preexisting mental illness get worse behind bars. One of the named plaintiffs, for example, is a man named John W. Narducci Jr. His life story is tragic, his criminal conduct unrelenting. Many years ago, his sentencing judge ordered that he be imprisoned in a place that could adequately tend to Narducci's "serious psychological and emotional problems." That didn't happen. And soon he may be free.

Two other Supermax inmates, who are not yet named plaintiffs in the lawsuit, are so severely mentally ill that federal lawyers have allegedly gone to court -- repeatedly -- to have them involuntarily committed or forcibly medicated. One of these men, paragraph 57 of the complaint contends, is scheduled to be released in October 2012 after having had no mental health treatment for the past six years. Paragraph 58 of the complaint focuses upon the other inmate, whom prison officials themselves have conceded has a "mental disease or defect."

AN AMERICAN GULAG

The worse the mentally ill men behave without their medication and treatment, the worse they are treated by prison officials.

Over 150 years ago, in a book aptly titled *House of the Dead*, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote that "the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." This new lawsuit, styled *Bacote v. Federal Bureau of Prisons*, enters Supermax in a way that none of us ever has before. For these inmates, the prison is a gulag, a place of unspeakable cruelty and state-sponsored wickedness, run by officials who ignore their own policies and seem to revel in humiliating prisoners by depriving them of basic human dignities.

The problem starts even before the men ever get to Supermax. Federal policy prohibits inmates with serious mental illness from being transferred there. But seriously mental ill inmates are nonetheless assigned there anyway. Bureau of Prison policy next requires incoming prisoners to be properly evaluated at ADX for mental health problems. But the complaint alleges that these initial screenings are "only perfunctory interviews" that typically consist of "a few questions asked in a minute or two."

The result is that many prisoners who are significantly mentally ill are not so diagnosed upon entering Supermax. And even those men who are so diagnosed are often not given appropriate

treatment in the months and years that follow their arrival at the facility. For example, the complaint alleges that prison officials violate "every major requirement" of the following federal regulation which is designed to govern the treatment of mentally ill prisoners at Florence:

Mental health services. During the first 30-day period in a control unit, staff shall schedule the control unit prisoners for a psychological evaluation conducted by a psychologist. Additional individual evaluations shall occur every 30 days. The psychologist shall perform and/or supervise needed psychological services, psychiatric services will be provided when necessary. *Prisoners requiring prescribed psychotropic medication are not ordinarily housed in a control unit.* (Emphasis added in complaint.)

The plaintiffs contend that "it is common for BOP to place an incoming prisoner taking psychotropic medication in the Control Unit, where such medication is not permitted." The result is predictable. Paragraph 49 of the complaint:

BOP justifies this in Orwellian fashion: it discontinues the prisoner's medication, thereby making the now non-medicated prisoner "eligible" for placement in the Control Unit. Then, when this newly eligible prisoner requests medication needed to treat his serious mental illness, he is told that BOP policy prohibits the administration of psychotropic medication to him so he should develop "coping skills" as a substitute for medicine being withheld.

Instructing a prison confined in long-term segregation and who has schizophrenia or bipolar illness to self-treat this disease with coping skills is like demanding that a diabetic prisoner learn to "cope" without insulin.

There is the legal requirement to provide medical treatment for mentally ill prisoners. And then there are the practical realities. Paragraph 63 of the complaint alleges that "only two mental health professionals -- both psychologists -- are responsible for the mental health of approximately 450 prisoners housed at [Supermax], many of whom have serious chronic mental illnesses or other mental health issues, and many others of whom experience periodic acute mental health crises."

The result, contend the prisoners, isn't just that they don't get appropriate mental health therapy or adequate medication. Even when they are allowed to take pills, they allege, the Supermax "staff distributes medications on an irregular schedule that is often inconsistent with the instructions for consumption of the medication." The distribution of the medicine is "haphazard and sometimes reckless" and "frequently" results in the wrong medicine being given to the prisoners.

THE DETAILS

MORE ON SUPERMAX



Part 2: The Faces of a Prison's Mentally Ill



Part 3: The Constitution and Mentally Ill Prisoners



Death, Yes, but Torture at Supermax?

The complaint alleges that the "disciplinary model at ADX is often an instrument of terror and abuse, deployed by staff members who sometimes provoke the very conduct they punish and who lack the training and skills necessary to manage mentally ill prisoners safely and effectively." This is not uncommon at prisons all around the country. But paragraph 70 of the

complaint alleges specific details of the effects of such "grossly inadequate training" on mentally ill prisoners at Supermax:

Thus, mentally ill prisoners, including those in the throes of a psychotic episode, frequently are subjected to barbaric treatment and physical torture more suited to the dungeons of medieval Europe than to a modern American prison. For example, mentally ill prisoners are routinely "four pointed" -- chained by the arms and legs to a concrete block -- often for extended periods. While chained, mentally ill prisoners often are left to urinate and defecate on themselves, and are denied basic nutrition.

Here's another example of life for mentally ill prisoners at Supermax. From paragraphs 71 and 72 of the complaint:

In some cases, ADX staff turn the simple (although cruel and unusual) refusal to feed a prisoner into a deceptive hoax. ADX prisoners, including those in four point restraints, sometimes are put on a disciplinary "sack lunch" nutrition program in which they are fed not standard prison trays but a paper bag containing a sandwich or two and a piece of fruit.

Many mentally ill prisoners at ADX who are placed on sack lunch restriction have received sacks (suitably videotaped) being delivered to their cells. But when they open the bags (off camera) they sometimes are empty. Through this ruse ADX staff produce false video evidence of feeding, raising (if only for a minute) the prisoner's hope for basic nutrition, then smash the often-chained and always hungry prisoner's hopes with a bag of air. ...

As a result of this type of abuse, other prisoners in nearby cells and ranges are often subject to the shrieking and suffering of prisoners undergoing such abuse.

And from paragraph 60:

Likewise, in 2010, a severely and chronically depressed prisoner who had attempted to kill himself a few months earlier was escorted to the ADX [Special Housing Unit] after throwing milk at a corrections officer. He was placed in a cell just vacated by another chronically ill prisoner who had smeared the cell's floors, walls, bed and mattress with feces. The prisoner was given no cleaning supplies, and was not issued a blanket, towel or sheet. He used a roll of toilet paper in the cell to try to wipe the feces off of a spot on the floor that was large enough to enable him to lie down. For two days, he remained lying on that single "clean" space.

Upon information and belief, ADX staff knowingly chose to place the seriously mentally ill prisoner in the feces-caked cell just vacated by another seriously mentally ill inmate and left him there for two days for the purpose of punishing him by means of another prisoner's excrement.

When there is mental health counseling, the plaintiffs allege, it is often a "farce." From paragraph 68 of the complaint:

Members of ADX mental health staff occasionally talk to prisoners, but even those occasional counseling sessions are almost invariably conducted through the bars of the prisoner's cell, in the immediate presence of a correctional officer and within earshot of other prisoners housed in the same range. This process turns psychological counseling into a farce. ...

Although a safe, secure and private room for psychology counseling is available within steps of the cell of virtually every cell at ADX, staff members routinely ignore prisoner requests to discuss serious psychological problems in private.

That is, prison mental health officials are routinely ignoring such requests when they aren't busy performing correctional functions -- a bit of double-duty that effectively neutralizes whatever "trust" the mentally ill inmate may have formed with his mental health contact. It's hard to bare your soul to your therapist and then see your therapist serving as a prison enforcer. Paragraph 71 of the complaint makes this startling allegation:

Upon information and belief, the BOP requires or encourages members of the mental health staff at ADX to perform correctional functions. Upon information and belief, such staff members have: performed prisoner escort duty within the prison while armed with weapons, openly brandishing those weapons in the presence of prisoners; worked shifts in the prison's gun towers; appeared at the doorways of prisoners brandishing clubs in an aggressive fashion; and participated in violent acts toward prisoners, including, on at least one instance, participating in a violent cell extraction while wearing riot police protection gear.

It is a cycle. The men become mentally ill, or become more mentally ill, because they are not given proper medication or treatment. And the worse the mentally ill men behave without their medication and treatment, the worse they are treated by prison officials. For example, the plaintiffs allege that they were threatened by prison officials for their involvement in this case. "If you don't drop this lawsuit they will fuck you over, trust me on this," one Supermax staffer allegedly told one of the plaintiffs.

MEDITATIONS ON A DEFENSE

The Bureau of Prisons will soon have to respond to the allegations of the complaint -- I promise I will write about that, too -- and it is likely that federal lawyers will do so not on the merits but by claiming the lawsuit must be dismissed on procedural grounds. This is how the feds have responded virtually every other time Supermax prisoners have sought adequate mental health care by suing officials. Fourteen times the prison has been sued in the past nine years, the complaint alleges: more than one lawsuit a year.

Prison officials have successfully blocked the previous litigation by arguing that the prisoners had not exhausted their administrative remedies. This is a frequent and reasonable requirement in lawsuits against the government, requiring potential litigants to seek legal redress first with the agency with which they have a dispute. No federal judge will permit a case like this to proceed to discovery -- much less a trial -- unless that judge is convinced that no remedy is available directly from the offending government actors.

The complaint alleges that the plaintiffs have exhausted the avenues for grievance within Supermax. From paragraph 202:

Upon information and belief, and by way of illustration only, ADX staff members deny prisoners access for forms that BOP requires prisoners to use to submit complaints, "lose" administrative remedy paperwork or delay its submission so that prisoner appeals are deemed "untimely, fail to adequately investigate prisoner complaints, and fail to remedy obvious problems brought to BOP's attention by means of those prisoner complaints that do evade the impediments imposed by BOP itself.

Perhaps you are wondering if the prison has an inside "watchdog" official who might be authorized to investigate allegations of misconduct by prison staffers. There is indeed such a person at Supermax, the complaint alleges. Her name is Dianna Krist. Her title is "Special Investigative Agent." But Krist appears to be married to Captain Russell Krist, who is responsible for "all corrections functions" at Supermax. No court in the country would countenance such an obvious conflict of interest -- and federal policy prohibits it.

Earlier this month, I wrote in depth about another new lawsuit brought against Supermax, *Vega v. Davis*, which seeks to require prison officials to answer for the 2010 suicide of an inmate named Jose Vega. In that case, Vega's brother seeks money damages from the feds. Vega is not alone, either. At least five other prisoners have committed suicide at Supermax since it opened in 1994, the complaint alleges. Things have been bad there for a very long time, in other words, even as Supermax has been widely hailed as the pride of the nation's penal system.

This class-action lawsuit seeks to have the federal judiciary order specific, fundamental changes to the mental health policies in place at the Bureau of Prisons as well as the mental health practices in play at Supermax. More training for prison staff. More counseling and medication for mentally ill prisoners. More effective safeguards to increase the accuracy of diagnoses and the commitment to sustained treatment. No more torture of the diagnosed ill. No more taunting of them.

These are not frivolous requests. They represent basic human rights to which even our nation's convicted felons are entitled under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The Bureau of Prisons is not permitted to treat men like animals no matter what they have done. And if federal lawyers now say that Supermax's mentally ill prisoners -- who aren't supposed to be there in the first place -- don't deserve answers and reform, then surely the rest of us do. We all will be judged by the level of inhumane treatment our prisoners receive -- for they receive that treatment in our name.

This is the first in a three-part series about the new class-action lawsuit filed Monday against the Bureau of Prison and the officials who run ADX-Florence, the so-called "Supermax" facility that houses some of the nation's most dangerous criminals. The second part will focus on the plaintiffs named in the lawsuit. The third part will focus upon some of the many legal issues involved in the litigation.

Supermax Prisons: Views from Above

By Christoph Gielen New York, NY, USA

February 19, 2013

[Email](#)



Christoph Gielen surveys Arizona's Florence State Prison from a helicopter, 2010. Photo by Nina Gielen.

For this dispatch, Christoph Gielen shares a preview of images and text from his forthcoming "American Prison Perspectives" series. Since 2010, Gielen has used photography to confront the rapid construction of new high-tech prisons, part of a

nationwide progression toward increased-security prison systems. The prison business is booming: Recognizing prisons as a growth industry, financial magazines like Barron's have urged investors to consider buying shares of Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest owner and operator of private prisons in the U.S.

With support from the Fund for Investigative Journalism, Gielen teamed up with the Canadian cultural historian Michael Prokopow to report on how Supermax prisons are designed. For his series, Gielen combines the stated objectives of prison architects with firsthand accounts of solitary confinement and the perspectives of mental health experts on the effects of isolation. In doing so, he provides a rare glimpse into the dry "science" of building maximum-security prisons.

In 2014, Gielen will launch a website entirely devoted to the "American Prison Perspectives" series. In addition to the photographs, the site will host an online forum in the hope of engaging regularly with the general public.

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I specialize in photographic and video aerial studies of urban development, documenting its relation to land use. During a 2010 helicopter photo mission in Arizona, where I recorded sprawl patterns—the hidden geometries of suburban and exurban developments that become visible only when seen from far above the ground—I also flew over a number of prison complexes. Observing residential construction, I normally take my time to find the right position in flight, but these quick "fly-bys"—for example, over one of the Florence State Prison compounds, as seen in the shot above—were necessarily much less controlled. This airspace is technically not restricted, but it's more or less understood that as a member of the general public, one shouldn't come too close to any of these high-security places.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XVI Arizona*, 2010.

Initially I was interested only in the comparative planning forms of these prison structures, in contrast to regular commercial housing developments. But then I quickly became intrigued by what else these constructions might reveal, both from an aesthetic and a sociological point of view.

The above shot shows one of the six complexes that together comprise Arizona's Florence State Prison, which includes units classified as medium to maximum security. (The unit seen here is likely a high-security facility, but clearly not maximum security.)

"Have prisons and jails become the mass housing of our time?"

Since 1980, when the U.S. prison population began to increase dramatically, Americans have been living in an era of mass incarceration, which Jeremy Travis, president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has called one of the “greatest social experiments of our time,” the ramifications of which have yet to be seen. Members of the Spatial Information Design Lab, a think- and action-tank at Columbia University, go so far as asking, “have prisons and jails become the mass housing of our time?”

Raising questions about a culture of incarceration is pertinent at a time when the U.S. prison population is at an unprecedented peak. The building of new prison systems appears to be a growth industry, which I address through visual representation from both new physical and ideological vantage points. With this work I want to expose the prevailing trends—documented in studies such as Sharon Shalev’s prizewinning book *Supermax: Controlling Risk Through Solitary Confinement*—toward building increased-security prison systems, and illustrate how prison design and architecture do in fact reflect political discourse, economic priorities, cultural sentiments and social insecurities, and how, in turn, these constructed environments also become statements about a society.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XVIII Arizona*, 2010.

This shot shows the Perryville State Prison complex. I was particularly interested in photographing this site after encountering a particularly appalling anecdote in a 2009 article in *The New York Daily News*, and reading more about the story through prison message boards.

A 48-year-old inmate named Marcia Powell died at this prison in an outside cage—presumably located near one of the zigzag rows of housing complexes shown above—on May 20, 2009, after four hours of exposure to 107-degree temperatures. Powell suffered first- and second-degree burns, and a core body temperature of 108 degrees when she died, an autopsy report showed later. According to a 3,000-page report released by the

Arizona Department of Corrections, she pleaded to be taken back inside, but was ignored. Not permitted to use the restroom, she died in her own excrement.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XIII Arizona*, 2010.

This image shows the Perryville State Prison from another angle. It is a medium- to high-security facility, with an inmate capacity of roughly 2,400, in eight housing units. There are two dedicated death-row facilities in the state of Arizona where prisoners await execution, divided into male and female units. The women’s death row is located in this prison compound in the “Lumley Unit.”

In “American Prison Perspectives,” I intentionally turn surveillance technology back on the surveillance apparatus of the prison itself—in a sense democratizing the use of

surveillance. In other words, my method of image-capture becomes an inseparable part of its photographic content.



Christoph Gielen, *Deer Crest II Suburban California*, 2010.

Seen here is a small, master-planned city section in Ventura County, California, built by the Janss Investment Company in the mid-1950s. It includes about 1,000 custom home lots, a regional shopping center and an industrial park. According to June Williamson, Associate Professor of Architecture at the City College of New York, one could say that its layout represents an extension of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City ideal (c. 1900), which was polygonal, with concentric zones to be put to various uses, and surrounded by a greenbelt. By the 1960s and 1970s, orthogonal grids were out and many residential community master planners turned to centralized circular or polygonal geometric

patterns as an alternative, especially when they were building on fields that didn't need to plug into preexisting street patterns.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XIV Arizona*, 2010.

What connects the shot of a city section in California to these new prison perspectives is a startling recurrence of polygons, and in particular hexagons. I started noticing these prominent patterns cropping up repeatedly when I first photographed sprawl from helicopters, detecting hidden geometries in housing developments from the sky. And that really brings the notion of prisons as our new mass housing full circle.



Christoph Gielen, *Deer Crest V Suburban California*, 2010.

The above is one more view, from a higher altitude, of the Ventura County city section.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XVIII Arizona*, 2010.

The resemblance in shape between the Ventura County section and the Florence State Prison maximum-security unit above—completely unrelated in function—is striking. This prison’s six housing units have an inmate capacity of nearly 4,000. In Supermax, Sharon Shalev cites the maximum-security tracts seen here as forerunners of today’s increasingly high-tech Supermax facilities. The Florence State Prison is also the “Central Unit” of Arizona’s death chamber, where the current method of execution is lethal injection, as it is in all 33 states where capital punishment remains legal.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XVII Arizona*, 2010.

“American Prison Perspectives” calls attention to architectural features specifically developed to minimize prisoner movement and to produce isolation within the complex. My photographs pull into sharp focus such design details as “exercise yards” consisting of empty outdoor 8 x 10 foot enclosures attached to the back of each cell block, with bare concrete surfaces and a set of bars atop their high walls. “Exercise yard” is a misnomer; they should be called “cages.”

I counted a total of 94 such “exercise yards,” in 47 divided sets attached to the exteriors of these eight cross-shaped housing pods—all redolent of Marcia Powell’s case. They can be clearly seen in the shot below as the bright sunlight strikes this silver-roofed complex.



Christoph Gielen, *Untitled XV Arizona*, 2010.

Providing the opportunity to visually examine these restricted locations is significant; while some (typically low-resolution) satellite images of prison complexes are available in the public domain, the public cannot inspect Supermax facilities on the ground. Even journalists may be barred from entering, and almost certainly from taking photos on-site, due to new security measures in place since September 11, 2001, which often require background checks and security screening. Paradoxically, many journalists have been granted interviews with individual prisoners—as permitted by state law and at the discretion of the warden—even as their access to the prisons themselves remains scant.

I am particularly excited about recent related discussions from within the architectural sector. Specifically Canadian architect Raphael Sperry, the first architect to receive the

Justice Initiative Fellow grant by Open Society Foundations, announced his campaign to amend the American Institute of Architects' Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct to "prohibit the design of spaces intended for long-term solitary isolation and execution."

We need to examine the culture of incarceration responsible for keeping a substantial portion of the U.S. population imprisoned.

The debate about solitary confinement is particularly relevant now because it coincides with a financial tipping point: Despite continued support by various State Departments of Corrections and interest groups, maintaining high-tech Supermax systems is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Illinois, for example, is among a growing number of economically troubled states gradually shifting away from the use of Supermax prisons. State legislators there have closed the Tamms Correctional Center, the state's only super-maximum security prison. The true cost of keeping inmates confined in Supermax prisons, particularly in relation to state budgets and taxpayer spending, is thus in urgent need of further examination.

Beyond this, we need to examine the culture of incarceration responsible for keeping a substantial portion of the U.S. population imprisoned under what can only be deemed inhumane conditions. Current U.S. policies regarding solitary confinement are controversial not only considering definitions of torture under international law but also in light of our own Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. As Senator Dick Durbin urged in his June 19, 2012 appeal to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary (PDF), the stakes are high: More than 80,000 inmates are currently held in isolation in so-called Security Housing Units (SHUs), according to a 2005 Bureau of Justice Statistics census. They are locked up for as long as 23 hours a day in small single cells, without windows or direct access to natural light, and without meaningful activities of any kind.

What does our ongoing tolerance of this practice say about us as a society?