



HOW A MAINE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY REDUCED CONTRABAND INSTANCES TO ZERO

STOP SMUGGLING FROM UNDERMINING THE SECURITY OF YOUR INMATES AND STAFF WITH A BODY SCANNER

Whether it's illicit drugs, cigarettes, cellphones or other prohibited items, contraband among prisoners nationwide remains a constant test for correctional officers.

It's an ongoing battle for law enforcement officials, who have to deal with inmates making headlines for possessing contraband. One notable example involves an inmate in Atlanta who called himself "a motivational speaker for gangsters" in a video he posted online using a contraband cellphone while still in prison.

Weapons and drugs can pose a threat to the lives of both inmates and correctional officers. Drugs create power struggles and disorder and pose the threat of harmful exposure and potential overdose. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is so potent that it can cause respiratory failure when trace amounts of it become airborne. Often used to lace other narcotics, fentanyl is causing life threatening overdoses within inmate populations and for unsuspecting correctional officers when they are exposed to the narcotic.

Communication devices can also wreak all kinds of havoc. For instance, cellphones smuggled into prisons can be used to plot murders, escapes and other criminal activities.

According to the National Institute of Justice, wardens and correctional officials spend millions of dollars on metal detectors to curb the widespread use of contraband. In comparison, body scanners can be a cost-effective solution to intercepting contraband. As an additional layer to the screening process, body scanners can offer facilities another method to find metallic objects as well as contraband that metal detectors are unable to detect, such as narcotics and non-metallic objects.

Somerset County Jail in Madison, Maine, has about 70 officers and a capacity to hold about 234 inmates. Leaders there found contraband to be the scourge of the facility before they started to use a body scanner to screen inmates.

THE CHALLENGE: MANAGING THE MYRIAD ISSUES CAUSED BY CONTRABAND

For years, Sheriff Dale Lancaster and jail administrator Major Cory Swope tried to decrease the amount of contraband entering the facility.

“Contraband posed serious challenges for us, such as inmate drug overdoses, inmates manipulating the jail environment and inmates harming other inmates and officers, just to name a few of the issues,” said Lancaster, who was elected sheriff in 2015.

At Somerset County Jail, there were instances in which correctional staff unexpectedly had to deal with inmates with weapons or inmates who were under the influence. This led to correctional officers having to institute a labor-intensive “one-on-one” constant watch policy in which correctional officers would have to monitor individual inmates suspected of having contraband until they were cleared.

In one instance, a constant watch period lasted 10 days. That led to many hours of overtime, which strained the correctional staff and cost the facility more than \$10,000 in overtime pay for that single case. On average, these constant monitoring initiatives cost the facility \$3,000 to \$4,000 in overtime.

“We instituted a ‘no physical contact’ visitation policy after incidents like this where contraband would get in, but people were still bringing in drugs through the mail and through the intake and booking process, and we needed a thorough detector that would curtail these risks,” said Swope.

THE SOLUTION: AN X-RAY SCANNER BRINGS NEW LEVELS OF VISIBILITY

With officers searching cells every day for contraband, Swope and Lancaster were keenly aware of the problem and the strain on jail staff, and they took steps to address the issue.

After eight to 10 months of planning, a grant created a window of opportunity for Somerset County Jail. Of the many body scanners on the market, what caught the officials’ attention was the Smiths Detection B-SCAN. Both Lancaster and Swope viewed the B-SCAN as a promising solution in the fight against contraband.

“The quality of the imaging was far superior to any other systems we looked at,” said Swope. “When it comes to detecting contraband, it’s not just about the scan, it’s the quality of the imaging you rely on to make the call of whether there’s something suspect or out of the ordinary.”

Somerset County Jail enlisted the help of Access Control Systems, Inc. (ACS), an authorized channel partner of Smiths Detection based in Milford, NH to facilitate the purchase of the B-SCAN. ACS was able to help guide the jail’s administrative staff in system specifications, installation of the unit, staff training, and will service the system going forward. Charlie Patterson, President of ACS said, “We are pleased to have been able to play a such a pivotal role in Somerset County Jail’s purchase of a body scanner as we have with so many others across the greater Northeastern US. We know from our experiences that this technology greatly reduces the instances of contraband and makes the facility safer for staff, inmates, and visitors. And it pays for itself in overtime and overall operational cost savings”

Before the B-SCAN body scanner was purchased, officials at the Somerset County Jail relied on pat-down searches to search for contraband – and sometimes even strip searches when deemed absolutely necessary.

“But then again, that doesn’t screen for what’s inside the inmates’ bodies,” said Lancaster, “and you’d be surprised by what you’d find in the most unexpected parts of the body.”

Now all inmates go through the body scanner, which uses a low dose of X-rays to screen each individual.

THE RESULTS: SIGNIFICANTLY FEWER CONTRABAND INCIDENTS

Before the B-SCAN, the county jail averaged about eight incidents per year of smuggling of illicit materials into the housing areas of the jail. But since use of the body scanner was introduced into the booking and visitation process in 2015, the jail has had no contraband instances. The number of one-on-one constant watches has dropped dramatically, from 25 per year on average to just three per year.

“In all instances, contraband was detected by the B-SCAN, and we’ve had inmates voluntarily surrender their contraband,” said Swope. “The deterrent effect is absolutely extraordinary, and this has been an extreme time and cost savings for us since we do not have to initiate constant watches anymore.”

So what’s the takeaway for correctional administrators?

“If you’re really, really serious about reducing contraband in your jail, have those critical conversations with those who hold the purse strings,” Lancaster said, “and be prepared to make a case for what the benefits of having a body scanner could be for your facility.”

If you ask Swope and Lancaster, both would tell you that above all, the B-SCAN paid for itself by reducing the need for officer overtime and the number of workplace injuries among correctional officers.

For more information about the B-SCAN and other products to secure your facility, please contact Smiths Detection at usa@smiths-detection.com or Access Control Systems at sales@a-c-s.biz