

Name of Presenter: Gordon Thomey

Date Received: May 18 2004

---

## Submission to the Public Hearings RE: Workers Compensation Act of Manitoba

I am a Correctional Officer and I would like to start by reciting a poem that will hopefully give you some idea of what I do for a living.

THE FORGOTTEN COP What would the average citizen say if it were proposed that Police Officers be assigned to a neighborhood which was inhabited by no one but criminals and those Officers would be unarmed, patrol on foot and be heavily outnumbered?

I wager that the overwhelming public response would be that the Officers would have to be crazy to accept such an assignment. However, as you read this, such a scenario is being played out in all areas of the country.

We are Correctional Officers, not guards (who are the people who watch school crossings). We work at minimum, medium, and maximum security correctional facilities. We are empowered by the Province to enforce it's penal laws, rules, and regulations of the department of justice. In short, we are Policemen.

Our beat is totally inhabited by convicted felons who, by definition, are people who tend to break laws, rules, and regulations. We are outnumbered by as many as 50 to 1 at various times of our workday, and contrary to popular belief, we work without a sidearm. In short, our necks are on the line every minute of the day.

A correctional facility is a very misunderstood environment. The average person has very little knowledge of its workings. Society sends it's criminals to correctional facilities and as time passes, each criminals crime fades from our memory until the collective prison population becomes hordes of bad

people being warehoused away from decent society in a place where they can cause no further harm. There also seems to be a notion that prison inmates cease to be a problem when they are incarcerated. Correctional facilities are full of violence perpetrated by the prison population against the prison population and against facility staff.

Felonies are committed daily but are rarely reported, they are usually called "unusual incidents" and rarely result in criminal prosecution. Discipline is handled internally and as a rule, the public is rarely informed of these crimes. In the course of maintaining order in these facilities, many Officers have endured the humiliation of having urine and feces thrown on them. Uncounted Correctional Officers have been kicked, bitten, stabbed and slashed by homemade weapons, taken hostage, raped, and even murdered in the line of duty, all while being legally mandated to maintain their professional composure and refraining from any form of retaliation which would be the basis for dismissal from service.

In addition, to these obvious dangers, Correctional Officers face hidden dangers in the forms of AIDS, TB, Hepatitis B and C. Courts are now imposing longer sentences and the prison population is increasing far beyond the systems capacity. As the public demands more police on the street, governments every where are cutting police in prison where violence reigns supreme, jeopardizing all those working behind prison walls.

Although you will never see us on "911" or "Top Cops", we are Law Enforcement Professionals. We are the "FORGOTTEN COPS", hidden from public view, doing a dangerous beat, hoping someday to receive the respect and approval from the public who "WE SILENTLY SERVE".

Author Unknown.....(PRA)

The poem is quite clear: correctional officers work in a potentially dangerous environment, however that violence does not necessarily end when the correctional officer finishes his or her shift.

Correctional officers are trained to deal with violent situations, when an incident does occur we may have to physically constrain an inmate. We may use pepper spray or other like defensive weapons, then handcuff and shackle the inmate and place them in a restraint chair. This chair looks like an electric chair as the inmate's legs are bound to the chair as are the arms

hands and chest. This however does not stop the inmate from spitting at the officers so a spit guard is placed over the inmate's head. The nurse is also on hand just in case a problem arises. Once the inmate has calmed down, has accepted the consequences for his/her actions and we have some assurances that the inmate will not harm himself/herself or staff that inmate is placed in an isolation cell. Once in a cell the inmate will spend 23 hours out of 24 hours there with one hour of fresh air and a shower, this could last until the inmate is released, dependent upon the situation.

Now what do you think this inmate was thinking the whole time of this incident? It is very possible that he/she transferred all blame of the incident to the correctional officers involved. All that inmate may be able to think of is getting even with the staff that did this to them, and the inmate has plenty of time to envision those staff in his/her mind and to plan revenge. Sometimes there may be no planning just a slow hatred for the system and all "screws".

Now what about the correctional officer, most CO's after a short period of time have placed the incident behind them as there is always a new incident to contend with. So perhaps a month later or a year later or even a number of years after the officer has retired he runs across that same inmate. The CO in all likelihood has completely forgotten the incident but for the ex-inmate the incident may still be fresh in his memory and violence ensues.

How can this not be considered to be work related? Just as the firefighter who inhales toxic chemicals in the line of duty and later in life has the potential to develop "Occupational Cancer" so does a Correctional Officer who in the line of duty can be involved in situations where at a later time has the potential to be involved in "Occupational Violence"

What I just described is only one scenario where an officer could be hurt off duty due to his/her duties as a CO. There are many more, the point I am trying to make is that COs' are peace officers and the result of doing their/my job can result in violence even when we are not at work.

The Department of Justice has recognized the potential risk of assault that correctional officers face after work hours. The Department has in place a policy that states that a Correctional officer can have his/her mail (bills i.e.: hydro autopac etc) sent to their work location to prevent offenders from finding out the addresses of staff. MTS also has a policy where Correctional Officers can have unlisted phone numbers without additional costs. Both of these incentives clearly indicate that the department recognizes the potential for violence outside of the work location.

I sincerely hope that this hearing will look very closely at this issue and recommend that Correctional Officers be covered under Workers

Compensation for all work related injuries including those that occur when a staff is off duty.

Thank you for your time. Gordon Thomey Correctional Officer- 1