Controlling CONTRABAND

1,961 WEAPONS
187 ALCOHOL
1,265 DRUGS

Source: Louisiana Department of Corrections

Joe Norwood, of the 'shakedown' crew at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, puts Magnum, a drug-sniffing dog, through the paces during a routine search of one of the prison's dormitories. Authorities also have trained dogs to detect hidden cell phones.

Experts say Louisiana doing better than most states

BY GREG GARLAND
Westside bureau

ANGOLA — The walls of Lt. Joseph Russell's security office at Louisiana State Penitentiary are covered with dozens of snapshots of illegal drugs, homemade knives and other prohibited items. Corrections officers have found on inmates, visitors and staff at the sprawling prison.

The photos starkly illustrate a problem that prisoners across the nation face — keeping contraband out and finding prohibited items that inmates try to hide from the correctional staff.

Prison experts say it is impossible to keep out all contraband, despite the best efforts of prison administrators and security staff.

Louisiana, which implemented extensive court-ordered prison reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, does a better job than most, said Jim Gondles, executive director of the American Correctional Association.

"Angola is a picture-perfect example of how their system has turned around," Gondles said.

Gondles noted that Louisiana is one of only 14 states whose prisons are fully accredited by the corrections association.

The state has just under 20,000 inmates in 11 state-run and two privately managed prisons. To achieve accreditation, prisons must show they adhere to national standards set by corrections experts, he said.

But even well-run prisons confront problems with contraband.

"It's like fishing, you can't catch them all," Angola Warden Burls Cain said.

According to statistics compiled by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, illegal drugs were found inside state prisons on 1,265 occasions from 2006 to 2008.

Nails, pieces of metal and even toothbrushes are sharpened and fashioned into shanks by prisoners. Above are some of the nearly 2,000 weapons seized over the past three years in Louisiana's prisons.

> See CONTRABAND, page 6A
"Even in the most high-tech, high-security prisons in the country, contraband still gets in. ... We do shake downs continuously and we still find stuff, although not as much as some systems find."

STEVE RABIN, warden of Diess Convalescent Institute in Jackson

Advocate staff photos by AARON LAX

Bud, a black Labrador retriever, maintains his post at the visitors entrance to Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. An arriving visitor stands in an enclosed receptors telephone booth, with Bud on the other side. A fan mounted above blows air down over the dog's eyes. If the dog smells drugs, he scratches at the screen to alert officers.

CONTRABAND

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During the same three-year period, unsolicited tests con- ducted on inmates registered positive for drugs 4,024 times. The prison tested inmates more than 60,000 each year, covering two of the pockets Most are random, but others are conducted on "suspicious suspects" — which means in drugs, thieves, who suggests he might be using drugs.

The majority that turned up positive — 1,474 — regis- tered for THC, the chemical substance found in marijuana. But there were also 71 posi- tions for cocaine, 64 for am- phenamin and 119 for other drugs, according to data com- piled by prison officials.

Steflavac, chief of correc- tions for the corrections department, said drugs find their way into Louisiana's prisons in a variety of ways.

"For example, he said, an acquaintance may mail a packet of drugs, or a drug dealer might tape a packet of drugs to the soles of an inmate's shoes to avoid a pat-down. Or for an inmate on a work crew to avoid a pat-down, he finds an empty soda can along the highway.

When you've got a bunch of inmates trying to keep you, a little girl gets by you some- times," Travis said.

And the inmates can be in- voracious.

In one case, an inmate had a friend tape some marijuana to a paper airplane and slip it into the prison, and onto prison grounds, said Steve Rade, warden of Diess Convalescent Institute in Jackson.

"There's a lot of guys that like to make marijuana, then they will pay whatever they have to pay to get it," Rade said.

Drug-sniffing dogs, cell desk impairment searches and inmate strip-searches are among the measures em- ployed to keep contraband out of the prisons. So is sophis- ticated technology, such as ian scans that can detect the

Inmate drug tests

Inmates testing positive for drugs in state prisons from 2004-06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>THC (Marijuana)</th>
<th>Heroin</th>
<th>Cocaine</th>
<th>PCP</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>1,167</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>1,002</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections

slightest trace of drugs, said.

"Even in the most high-tech, high-security prisons in the country, contraband still gets in," said Rade, a 30-year veteran of Louisiana's corrections system.

He added, "We do shake- downs continuously and we still find stuff, although not as much as some systems find."

Corravac now provides advice for drugs, cell desks and other contraband to get into prisons, corrections, officials said.

Cain, the warden at Angola, said he was aware of a prob- lem before for prison correc- tions officers were caught.

He said that helped attract better personnel, instead of being prone to be corrupted. It also improved job conditions.

"What hurt us was when the pay was so low that we hired anybody who could walk and chew at the same time," Cain said.

"Most of this is gone now," Cain said.

Travis, chief of operations, said that "we kicked ass to turn that corrections officer into a paying job to keep it going and to keep that person in court and not to make money."

"If an officer falls into that trap, he can be blacklisted later with bringing drugs or other contraband, Travis said.

Rade said the small amount of drugs and contraband that gets into Louisiana's prisons appears to come in mostly through inmates on visits or work details.

They think it comes in through visitors and movement and even comes in through officers or employees smuggling it in," Rade said.

The fruit gets security at a prison is a pit to make it dif- ficult for visitors to slip drugs to an inmate. Their arms are subject to search and drugs are taken routinely through park- ing to sniff for the pre- sence of drugs.

At Angola, a maximum- security prison, an arriving visitor enters an enclosed receptacle resembling a telephone booth. A fan mounted above blows air down over the dog's eyes. A drug-sniffing dog on the other side of the wall sniffs a screen if it smells drugs.

Corrections officials say drugs and other contraband in prisons often fuel inmate vio- lence as they fight for control of the block system.

"If prisoners see what you are doing if you don't say it is," Travis said.

The consequences at Angola can be severe for an inmate who is stopped or committing an act of violence against another inmate.

Most of Angola's 2,500 in- mates are in the medium and low security at the state Department of Corrections, and they are forced to work. The most dangerous and disruptive inmates are locked down, locked in their cells for 24 hours a day, Cain said.

"They don't want to be there," Cain said.

He said inmates regularly bring in weapons, work in the fields or at other prison jobs for another group.

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