Angola inmate pedals invention

ANGOLA, La. (AP) — An inmate from Lafayette at the Louisiana State Penitentiary has created something of a dilemma for officials at the maximum security prison.

Prohibited from using a motorized lathe in the prison's hobby shop, Ivy Cormier recently combined ingenuity and a talent for woodworking to build a foot-powered lathe that works just as well.

Maybe too well.

The lathe is still sitting in a corner of the prison's carpentry shop where Cormier is assigned to work. Officials are trying to decide whether Cormier's invention thwarts the intent of a rule that limits motors on hobby shop machinery to one-eighth horsepower.

The rule is designed to discourage convicts from using high-powered equipment to make knives, zip guns and other items that are a threat to security.

Deputy Warden Richard Peabody also said the prison had a problem with electric motors disappearing from fans and other appliances and later turning up on hobby shop machines.

"I guess they had a little of that going on," Cormier said with a grin.

But Peabody said the dilemma will probably be solved soon. Warden John Whitley will make the final decision "because it involves an exception to policy," he said.

"This is a lot of good, creative work," Assistant Warden Mike Gunnells said.

Cormier uses a lathe to turn pieces of wood or deer antler into beads of various sizes and design that he strings into necklaces.

Angola inmate Ivy Cormier, Lafayette, with invention.