'Old Sparky' obsolete for executions

ANGOLA, La. (AP) — Louisiana's electric chair was sent to a new home Thursday after being removed to make room for equipment used in lethal injection, the state's new form of legal death.

Louisiana State Penitentiary Warden John Whitley said a metal table would replace the electric chair in the penitentiary's death chamber.

The electric chair was built in 1941 when the state abolished hanging as the means of execution. Since that time, 77 prisoners have died in the chair.

Public Safety and Corrections Secretary Bruce N. Lynn decided to give the oak chair to the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans, Whitley said.

"It's the end of an era," said corrections spokeswoman Martha Jumonville. "It's part of our history."

Corrections officials said the first use of intravenous injections to carry out the death penalty could come Sept. 19. That is the 11th execution date set for twice-convicted murderer Antonio James, 35, of New Orleans.

James was convicted of murdering Henry Silver, 71, during a New Year's Day 1979 armed robbery in the New Orleans French Quarter, and sentenced to death. He also was convicted of murdering Alvin Adams in New Orleans in 1979, and sentenced to life in prison.

Defense attorneys argued in his appeals that he should not be put to death because he has an IQ of less than 60.

Whitley said witnesses at the state's first lethal injection execution will be provided with a written copy of the condemned prisoner's final statement.

Previously, condemned criminals were allowed to speak to witnesses through a public address system before they were strapped into the chair.

When witnesses are assembled, "they will see the inmate strapped on the table with the IV hooked up," Whitley said.

A private contractor built the table or gurney after Angola inmates balked at orders to build the device in July. The protest died out after Whitley said the table would be built outside the prison.

Whitley said the table cost $5,000. Employees of the table's manufacturer installed it after the electric chair was removed, but declined to identify themselves or their company.

The company requested anonymity because of the potential for retaliation by family members of death row inmates, Whitley said.

Intravenous tubes will extend from the table through a hole in the wall to an enclosure where the lethal doses of three drugs will be injected into a saline IV solution.