Warden wants time for executions changed

By DANE EVEN
Associated Press writer

ANGOLA (AP) — Lawmakers this spring will be asked to change the time for executions in Louisiana so they don't come in the middle of the night.

"I have not found a logical reason — and I've done a lot of research on it — why the law says between midnight and 3 a.m.," said Louisiana State Penitentiary Warden Ross Maggio.

Maggio has asked the state Department of Corrections to submit legislation during the regular session that begins in April to change the execution time to between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Incoming Secretary of Corrections C. Paul Phelps has said he has no objection to a change, Maggio said.

"With the later time, it keeps a lot of my key employees up until the middle of the night, and then they have to come back to work the next morning," Maggio said in an interview.

"It just would be more convenient for everybody involved to go to an earlier time frame."

After 22 years, Louisiana in the last three months has had two executions — Robert Wayne Williams last Dec. 14 and Johnny Taylor Jr. last Wednesday.

Williams was executed about 1 a.m., while Taylor's execution came shortly after midnight.

For an execution, Maggio has to take extra precautions at the state's maximum security prison. For the Williams execution, 104 prison employees joined the regular nightshift, according to the prison magazine The Angolite.

The extra employees logged 1,071 hours of overtime at a cost of $14,177, The Angolite reported.

"I haven't got it down that close, but I know it cost thousands of dollars in overtime. However, that isn't the main consideration. An earlier time would just be more convenient for all," said Maggio.

He said some states have executions early in the morning or before noon, but he rejected that idea because it would do away with a normal workday for inmates.

During the two executions here, all inmates were either locked in their cells or restricted to their dorms. Club meetings and recreational activities for the night were called off.

The Angolite reported that after the Williams execution in December there was a "verbal outburst from a number" of death row inmates and one inmate was disciplined because he didn't quit yelling when ordered to be quiet.

Timothy Baldwin, a death row inmate, was quoted as saying, "If they execute Robert Wayne, then there's not a lot of hope for the rest of us."

Maggio said he didn't hear of any "strong reaction" among death row inmates after the Taylor execution.

"I guess there would be a higher degree of anxiety among them. I think that would only be natural," he said.