

# Fresno County Jail System Assessment

The Fresno County Jail *system* consists of four “local detention facilities.” Three of these facilities are located in the main downtown area of the City of Fresno. These facilities are located in close proximity to each other and the courts, and are connected via underground tunnels. The fourth jail, a facility for sentenced inmates, is located approximately 2 miles south of the main city core in an industrial area.

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Rated Capacity</b>	<b>2005 ADP</b>	<b>Age</b>
• Main Jail	1064	930	1989
• Satellite Jail	96	172	1986
• North Annex	1104	1248	1993
• South Annex	528	581	1947

## MAIN JAIL

The Main Jail was constructed in the late 1980s and opened in 1989. The *Main Jail* is a six story building – some stories with second “tier” levels - that contains most of the core services for the jail system including: intake receiving, jail administration, an infirmary, court holding and inmate housing. This facility has a Title 24; California Code of Regulations (CCR) “rated capacity” of 1064 inmates. This does not include medical space or other “special use cells.”



Law enforcement agencies with arrestees enter the facility via a vehicle sallyport located on the north side of the facility. The sallyport door is remotely operated by staff in the facility's control room and observe waiting vehicles via a video monitor. This vehicle area will accept multiple cars and/or interstate busses used to transport inmates.

Once in the secured sallyport, officers access the booking area for the jail system. This booking area consists of three booking windows, one of which is staffed by a registered nurse who performs a medical pre-screening on the arrestee. The arrestees are searched for contraband and enter one of a series of holding cells adjacent to this booking area. This area is significantly undersized for the population it serves. This is evidenced by the lengthy backlog of police vehicles that are lined up outside of the sallyport



during busy hours to wait their turn to book their arrestees. This backlog not only puts a strain on the booking staff, it takes these officers out of service from their respective jurisdictions for extended periods of time.



The inmate is led to a “dress out area” adjacent to the booking holding cells after necessary paperwork is completed (booking and classification). Here, the inmate is showered, provided with jail clothing and assigned to appropriate

housing.

While the first floor consists of intake and release related areas, the second floor is dedicated to an infirmary including a medical treatment room, medical records, a pharmacy and dedicated medical housing. This floor is not a hospital, nor a Correctional Treatment Center; rather it provides space for “out-patient” type care. Inmates needing in-patient care are



transported to a local hospital where staff provides necessary security during the duration of their stay.

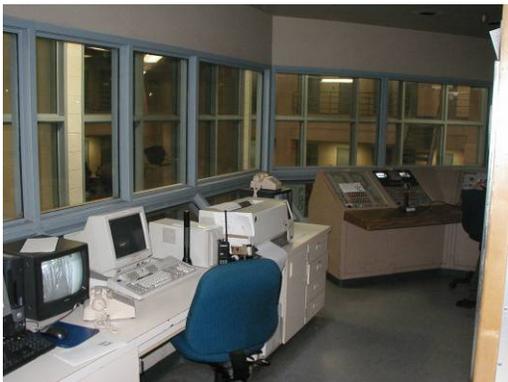


The third, fourth, fifth and sixth floor of the Main jail are identical. These floors consist of six “pods” – each containing sixteen cells with eight on the main floor and eight on the second tier level. These sixteen cells share a common dayroom and are all visible to a central security station that is located in the center of the floor (with a 360 degree view).



In addition to the six pods on each floor, there are ten administrative segregation cells arranged in a linear fashion. These are single occupancy cells that are used to confine the most dangerous inmates in the system. Each inmate is afforded a period of time each day to access the adjacent “dayroom” (albeit a long narrow one) and use the shower.

One of the unique aspects of this facility is the fact that these pods of double occupancy cells are “triple-bunked”. Under a 1993 “Pilot Project” with the California Board of Corrections, these cells were allowed to exceed their normal rated capacity by adding a third level to each bunk in each cell. In addition, the doors to the cells are left open so that the inmates may have free access to the dayroom. Essentially, these floors have become very expensive dormitories. Dormitories that allow the free access to the dayroom, as



these pods allow, are much cheaper to construct than the double occupancy cells. The only explanation for this occurring is the fact that the system was overcrowded and needed additional beds. Hopefully, one day, these pods will be reverted back to the function (double occupancy) that they were constructed for.



Each housing floor of the Main Jail also contains its own visiting area. The public accesses this area through a dedicated “non-secure” space and is directed to the proper floor. The inmates are escorted to the secure area on each floor and provided their visits. “Bringing the services to the inmates” is a cost effective and safe way to perform these activities and eliminates the need to escort these inmates between floors using the stairwell or elevators.

The outdoor exercise area is located on the roof of the facility. This exercise area is sub-divided into smaller exercise yards to afford exercise to different classifications of inmates at the same time. Unfortunately, this area does not take advantage of bringing the services to the inmates with the inmates needing to be escorted up floors to access this area.



Also located in the Main Jail, is the main control room. Here one or two staff controls all access doors and elevators. All security systems and fire alarms are also controlled here. This is an extremely busy area during most of the day and night and only slows down briefly during early morning hours.

## NORTH ANNEX JAIL

The North Annex Jail is the newest facility in the Fresno County Jail System. It was initially constructed adjacent to the Main Jail and opened with two floors in 1993. In December 2002, three more floors were opened giving it a total rated capacity (by the Corrections Standards Authority) of 1104 beds. Similar to the Main Jail, the second, third, fourth and fifth floors each have second housing tiers. Pictured on the right are the Main Jail on the left and the North Annex jail directly next to it.



The first floor of the North Annex Jail contains a public lobby, staff locker rooms, and most importantly, two courtrooms – Division # 95 and 96. These courtrooms provide excellent security for the inmates whose cases are assigned there.

The second, third, fourth and fifth floors consists of six pods of dormitories with triple bunks on a main level and a second tier level. While each pod has 72 beds, they are only rated for 48 inmates. These dormitories represent relatively inexpensive construction of a hardened jail environment. The difficulty with this type of housing is that “like classified inmates” of lower levels (medium security) must be identified to be housed in each pod. This limits the ability to house higher security inmates without risking adverse incidents.



These triple bunks not only create an extremely close housing environment, they limit the visibility of inmate areas by staff when they are occupied. It should also be noted that upon examination, these bunks were not “correctional grade” fixtures that do not allow tampering.



Each floor has an elevated “security station” (or control room) that sits in a raised portion in the center of each floor. There is an intervening room between the security station and the dorm/dayroom space that can be described as a “staging area.” Staff is generally afforded good sightlines into the dorm/dayroom areas and can monitor inmate activities. When this area is crowded, however, good sightlines are diminished.

Each floor on the North Annex Jail has its own dedicated “outdoor” exercise yard. Inmates are escorted to these yards from their housing units without the need to use stairwells or elevators. This is another example of bringing the services to the inmates that allows much safer inmate movement activities.



In addition to the exercise areas and visiting, each floor has its own medical exam room. Again, the services are brought to the inmate providing less inmate movement between floors. Inmates are triaged here and the more serious cases are transferred to the infirmary and/or hospital.

Inmate meals for all four of the detention facilities are prepared off-site (approximately two miles away) in a commercial kitchen by a private vendor. Hot meals are delivered via insulated trays on carts to the inmates in their respective housing units. This is a very cost-efficient system, as valuable security areas of the jail are not used for the preparation of meals.



Underground tunnels connect all three of the detention facilities located in close proximity in downtown Fresno. Inmates are escorted to and between the detention facilities as well as courts that also have access to the tunnels. This is a very efficient system that, combined with adequate staffing, provides safety and security to the public, inmates and staff.



As with the Main Jail, the North Annex Jail has a well-equipped central control room. This space contains the heart of all security, fire, video and door systems for the facility. It is designed to provide maximum security for the facility, its staff and the inmates while allowing for the timely movement of staff and inmates through the facility. All elevators are also controlled within this space. The two staff assigned to this space are extremely busy

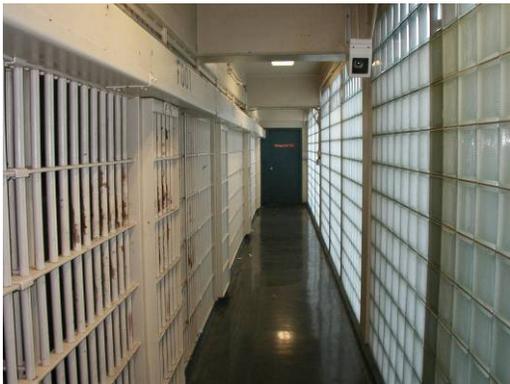
monitoring and operating the various systems of the jail.

## **SOUTH ANNEX JAIL**

The South Annex Jail is the original main jail for Fresno County. The core of the facility was opened in 1947 and additional space was provided in the early 1970s. This is the third of three detention facilities located in downtown Fresno that are connected by underground tunnels. Although this building appears to be a “normal county building” constructed several decades ago, its interior is worn out from continuous “hard” use. This facility is four stories tall (without tiers) with additional space in a basement level for court holding, a laundry, and program space.



Although county staff have made heroic efforts to maintain this facility, it represents obsolete “linear type” construction that is very staff intensive and unsafe. The door hardware, security systems, electronics and all other integral systems are considered antique requiring frequent timely and costly repairs to keep the facility functioning. Instead of using glazing (glass) where inmates are readily visible to staff, bars are used to provide security.



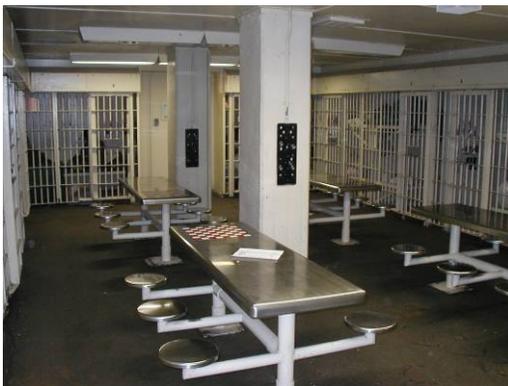
The cells and dormitories are located off of long corridors. Staff must walk to the end of each corridor to observe the inmates during their security checks. Inmates from the middle to the end of the “cell block” are provided plenty of notice that staff are making their checks and can easily cease or hide illegal activity. This jeopardizes the safety on staff, and especially some of the inmates.

For staff to open each cell, they must first operate an antique system of door controls. These controls stopped being made decades ago and their replacement parts are non-existent. Consequently, if parts break down (something that renders the entire cell or cell block unusable), parts must be custom fabricated. This is extremely expensive and time consuming (staff intensive).



Conversely, staff operating electronic controls (such as in the Main Jail pictured on the left) can observe the doors and the inmates while the doors are being operated. Additionally, replacement parts are much quicker to install and are readily available.

Although many of the spaces in this facility have received replacement systems and have been remodeled over the years, the basic structure – and indeed many of these systems - is fundamentally flawed. The control rooms on each floor have no visibility into the housing units and very limited visibility of inmates who pass their stations.



Even when staff accesses the dayrooms of a cellblock, visibility into each cell is severely restricted due to the use of bars. Although each cell in the picture to the left is full, it is very difficult to observe the inmates. One other reason that bars are no longer used in jail construction is that they provide easy “tie off” points for nooses for inmates who are intent on hanging themselves – a frequent means of committing suicide in jails.

Another design flaw of this facility that causes security and safety problems for staff and inmates is the size of the doors leading into cells and dayrooms. An average sized staff member may barely be able to normally access a door, but larger and taller staff must duck and/or turn sideways to enter and exit the room. This poses a dangerous situation should an inmate become combative at this opening. It is also very difficult to transport unconscious or injured inmates through these openings.





During the on-site visit, a freshwater plumbing line burst in this cell chase. This line was encased in concrete and required many staff hours to repair – during which time all water to the cells in this block were cut off. With water unavailable the inmates were unable to flush their toilets. Should there have been complications to this situation, the inmates would have needed to be moved to another space – a very difficult and time-consuming process given

the overcrowded nature of the jail system. This highlights the fact that the core systems in this building are falling apart and many are past their useful lifespan.

To be fair, some of the space in this facility has been remodeled using current technology including this high security disciplinary isolation/ administrative segregation area. However, this area represents a very small (and very staff-intensive) portion of this jail. It is an example of where considerable public funds have been invested into an obsolete facility with a questionable life span remaining.



The medical exam room and pharmacy are located on the second floor of this facility. Unlike the newer facility where services are delivered to where the inmates are housed, all inmates in this facility must be escorted to the sole space in this building used for this purpose. The medical space is also vastly undersized for the inmate population that it serves.

The outdoor exercise area for the facility is located on the roof. An observation station is located above and to the side of the yard for staff to supervise the exercise activity. Inmates must be escorted up elevators or stairwells to reach this area – a practice that is staff intensive and potentially dangerous.



Visiting is accomplished on the first floor of this facility with inmates remaining in the secure portion of the building and the visitors on the non-secure side. Again, inmates must be escorted down one or more floors to access this area - a staff intensive and potentially dangerous process.

One of the few spaces in this building that appears to be well planned in the laundry that is located in the basement. Here, all of the laundry for the jail system is washed and dried. The equipment looks relatively new and is very well maintained. Should this facility be replaced, it is possible to move this equipment to a newer location.



## SATELLITE JAIL

The final facility in the Fresno County Jail System is known as the Satellite Jail. This facility is located approximately two miles south of the downtown jail complex in an industrial area. Originally opened in 1986 as a “temporary facility” to house overflow inmates from the overcrowded old Main Jail (now the South Annex) while the new Main Jail was being constructed, this jail has become a permanent fixture in the jail system.



This “minimum security jail” is made up of four “mobile home type” dorm units (two to each side) with a covered common dayroom in the middle. Additionally, there is a staff administrative “trailer” located in the front of the complex to provide necessary support area for staff.

This facility is rated to hold no more than 96 inmates, yet has enough bed space for over three times this number – 300. These beds are often filled. Staff must have a very difficult time entering each of these dorm units to conduct security checks.



Although these inmates are considered to be “minimum security” ten years ago they would have been a much higher security level (due to the release of all truly minimum security inmates due to crowding). This creates a very volatile environment.

## **FACILITY ASSESSMENT OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Fresno County Jail System – consisting of four jails – is operating beyond its intended capacity. Despite this problem, the management and staff of the jail are doing an excellent job at operating a professional system. Incidents of litigation in the jail, one measurement of the success or failure to successfully operate a jail, are very minimal. Despite the efforts by staff, however, the age and architecture of one of the facilities (South Annex) poses a significant risk to the safety and security of staff, inmates and the citizens of Fresno County.

The following outlines the observations and recommendations for the physical plants:

- The jail system is crowded beyond the capacity that it was intended to safely operate. The Satellite Jail often operates above 300% of its rated capacity. Although the Main Jail was designed and constructed to operate as a jail with double occupancy cells, because of crowding, it operates as modified dorm units. The jail crowding diminishes the staff's ability to safely and securely operate the system.
- While two jail buildings are of newer podular design and contain modern electronics, the South Annex jail is operating far beyond its useful life. Any funds identified to improve the facility should only be spent to keep the facility operational until a new facility can be constructed and this jail closed. Since it takes from five to eight years to fund, design, construct and open a new jail, we strongly recommend that this process begin immediately. At the same time, firm plans should be made to close and tear down the obsolete South Annex Jail as soon as the new facility opens.
- The new jail designed to replace the South Annex should be constructed with single and double occupancy cells to provide staff with the necessary tools to safely house inmates with the many classification levels found in the Fresno system.

- The Main Jail should eventually revert back to its original intended purpose of providing double and single occupancy cells where inmates of varying classifications may be housed in the same building, but kept physically separate.
- The population of the Satellite Jail should be reduced as soon as possible to its rated capacity. True minimum-security facilities are relatively inexpensive to construct, however even a minimum-security facility can be dangerously crowded as is the Satellite Jail. Potential future use of the Satellite Jail includes operating as a “day reporting center”, a work release center, an electronic home monitoring center, or any out-of-custody minimum security program.