



For immediate release  
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## **Surrey remand centre a step in the right direction; overcrowding in jail facilities still a problem**

The government's announcement today that they will build a new remand centre in Surrey is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done to deal with chronic overcrowding in jail facilities, says the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU), which represents correction officers and sheriffs in the province.

"I welcome this announcement but remind the government again that we continue to be faced with chronic overcrowding, increased gang activity, and mounting health and safety concerns in our jails," said Dean Purdy, chairperson of the Corrections and Sheriffs Services Component of the BCGEU.

"We need this facility in the Lower Mainland, but equally as important is a new facility in the Interior," said Purdy, who works as a correctional supervisor at the Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre in Victoria.

"While details are still to come on the new Surrey facility, we are hopeful it will help solve many of the problems with overcrowding we are facing in the Lower Mainland," said Purdy. "The nine existing jails are currently running at close to 200 per cent over capacity."

Purdy says the root cause of the overcrowding crisis rests with decisions made by Victoria in 2002 and 2003, when a number of jail facilities were closed and 550 corrections officers were laid off. Inmate-to-staff ratios are now as high as 60 to one.

Health and safety concerns were highlighted in a recent survey of front-line staff by SFU professor, Dr. Neil Boyd. In it, seven out of 10 corrections officers admit they don't feel safe performing their duties.

Corrections staff file 50 per cent more WCB claims for on-the-job injuries caused by acts of force or violence than police officers, according to Purdy.

"Overcrowding leads to an increased risk of violence and an increase in staff assaults, which our members have to deal with on a daily basis," said Purdy.

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