



Who Needs To See This Bulletin?

Please ensure this is circulated to ALL STAFF (including Healthcare staff) who are involved in any form of prisoner assessment i.e. Cell Sharing Risk Assessment, ACCT etc.

Please print out copies of this bulletin and distribute around your establishment

Quick-Time Learning Bulletin Safer Cells

This 'quick time' learning bulletin is the fourth in a series of publications from Offender Safety, Rights & Responsibilities Group, (formerly Safer Custody & Offender Policy Group). The aim of the bulletin is to highlight key learning points which may be useful to all establishments in helping them to identify potential safer custody risks and take remedial action where it is needed.

Issue: Use Of Safer Cells To Support Prisoners At Risk Of Suicide Or Self Harm

Safer Cells are designed to make the act of suicide or self-harm by ligaturing as difficult as possible. It is achieved chiefly by reducing known ligature points as far as is possible and by installing specialist "anti ligature" furniture and fittings as an integral part of the cell fabric. Cells are either designated "normal accommodation" or "Safer Cell". Reduced risk cell is not a recognised term in relation to Safer Custody and must not be used.

Safer cells can provide useful accommodation for some at-risk prisoners. Findings from Prison and Probation Ombudsman Investigations and Inquests have identified the challenges of using and maintaining Safer Cells effectively. Learning from deaths indicates that there are specific issues about which establishments need to be aware:

KEY LEARNING POINTS:

- Where Safer Cells are identified as **no longer meeting the required standard** it is essential that this is communicated to all staff and the cell certificate is amended and sent to Regional Custodial Managers.
- **Maintenance of Safer Cells** will have been carried out by the Local Estates Maintenance Department over a number of years. If the Local Estates Maintenance Department are not included as part of the Safer Custody Team, or are not aware of the prison's safer custody strategy there is potential for repairs and maintenance of Safer Cells to be done in a way that may inadvertently introduce ligature points.
- In some deaths in custody it has been discovered that **staff mistakenly believed that they were placing an at risk prisoner into a Safer Cell when actually the establishment did not have any certified Safer Cells available.**
- Safer cells cannot deal with the problems underlying a prisoner's self-harming/suicidal behaviours, and so safer cells can only complement (i.e. not replace) a regime providing individualised and multi-disciplinary care for at risk prisoners. They should not be relied on as the sole answer to managing risk.
- **Prisoners may themselves alter the fabric or furniture in a Safer Cell in a way that introduces ligature points.** In one death in custody, it was discovered that the use of match sticks and glue to attach 'curtains' to a Safer Cell window provided a ligature point which could withstand a significant amount of weight. This addition had not been noticed by staff during accommodation fabric checks

The **most effective way of reducing risk** is through pro-social staff/prisoner interactions and delivery of the CAREMAP.

PROMPTS FOR ACTIONS:

- Who has responsibility for Safer Cells in your establishment?
- Do you have a system for checking Safer Cells and is there an audit trail?
- Is your Local Estates Maintenance Department part of your Safer Custody Team? How might they support each other in ensuring that Safer Cells are maintained to the appropriate standard?
A guide is at annex 10D of PSO 2700.
- What processes do you have in place to ensure that Safer Cells are not repaired, modified or adapted in ways that may potentially introduce ligature points?
- Do checks of accommodation include a comparison against the "Safer Cell Checklist" which complements the MOJ Estate Directorate's Safer Cell Guide- Single occupancy (March 2005)?
If you want a copy of the guide, contact your Regional Estates Manager.
- Do staff check that Safer Cells comply with the required standard before locating an at risk prisoner to the cell?
- Is the use of Safer Cells to manage at risk prisoners at your establishment appropriate?
- How do you ensure that Safer Cells are used to complement other holistic approaches to support at risk prisoners?

Contacts

If you have identified learning points which may assist other establishments in delivering safer custody please contact the National Safer Custody Managers and Learning Team at [scopelearning@noms.gsi.gov.uk].

Any resulting learning bulletins will be anonymous.