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## DOC groping for alternatives after ditching X-ray body scanners

By Jordan Bailey | Oct 02, 2016



The image produced by a RadPro  
SecurePASS scanner, from the manufacturer's website. (Image used with permission.)

Source: Proactive Technology Solutions, Inc.



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Maine Department of Corrections is considering new ways to detect contraband at correctional facilities after discontinuing use of transmission X-ray scanners, possibly because of concerns about radiation exposure. The Bureau of Labor Standards cited DOC earlier this year for "serious" safety violations related to operation of a body scanner at Maine Correctional Center.

The scanners were introduced by former Corrections Commissioner Joseph Ponte and were used in at least two facilities, Maine Correctional Center and Maine State Prison, for two to three

years starting around 2013, according retired MCC correctional officer Don Piper, who serves as the central Maine union chairman for the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees union.

“Everything we heard about [the scanners] was bad, and staff had to operate them all day,” he said. “Inmates could be scanned two or three times a day, and the staff could operate the scanner 100 times a day.”

Piper said correctional officers concerned that operating the machines was unsafe turned to him for help, but because the program had been established by the commissioner, not much could be done; he would help them follow the grievance process with DOC, but in the meantime they still had to operate the scanners. DOC did not respond to a request for correctional officer's grievances by press time. Jim Durkin of the Boston AFSCME chapter said the union's Augusta office received no grievances from MSP or MCC staff related to radiological scanners.

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition President Joseph Jackson said he saw the body scanner in use at MSP in 2013, and said the policy at the time was to scan inmates every time they entered or exited the facility.

Unlike the magnetic scanners visitors pass through when entering the prison, which can detect metal, Jackson said the scanners used on inmates produce an image of the inside of a subject's body. Piper said the devices could even detect a pin an inmate might be trying to smuggle in.

“It shows a lot,” Piper said. “Everything. Even all the feminine stuff.”

The scanners are more intrusive and irradiating than the backscatter X-ray systems used in airports, which were discontinued in 2013 due to privacy and health concerns. Those bounced X-rays off the surface of the body and exposed a subject to approximately 0.05 - 0.1 microsieverts per scan, according to radiology.org, a website maintained by American College of Radiology and the Radiological Society of North America.

The RadPro SecurePass scanner used at MCC uses transmission X-ray technology, which passes X-rays through the body and exposed subjects to 0.25 microsieverts per scan, according to a 2014 market survey commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice.

For comparison, a dental X-ray carries a dose of about 5 microsieverts, and a mammogram carries a dose of 400 microsieverts, according to radiology.org. In the United States, an average person receives about 3,100 microsieverts per year from natural background radiation, and another 3,100 microsieverts per year from medical procedures, according to the Health Physics Society.

Staff fears were compounded by lack of information. The Bureau of Labor standards cited MCC in January for failing to follow the manufacturer's recommendation to ensure “operator study and comprehension of the operator’s manual,” noting that a manual was not even available on-site. Safety training

for staff who operated the scanners either did not occur or was not documented, the citation states, and Piper said no safety information was posted on the walls or provided to employees.

“They were shown how to read them, and that was it,” he said.

The Bureau determined that not following the manufacturer’s safety recommendations violated Maine law which requires employers to provide a place of employment “free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to the employee.”

Other safety recommendations that were not followed included isolating the scanner from the surrounding area with protective screens, positioning it at least 6 1/2 feet from walls (to prevent reflection of radiation), conducting annual and daily inspections and maintenance, and periodically measuring radiation levels in the surrounding area. Inspectors found in January 2015 that the scanner was located 1 foot from a cement wall; only one screen was set up to protect the operator; and no required periodic maintenance and inspection tasks or radiation measurements had been done or no documentation was provided, according to the citation.

DOC and MCC were also cited for violating federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards by failing to perform surveys to evaluate radiation hazards in the area surrounding the radiation-emitting device.

Maine environmental health rules also require employees exposed to more than 1,000 microsieverts per year receive special instruction, but without measurements of the radiation in the work area, it is unlikely that the radiation dosages staff were being exposed to was known during the period before the citation was issued.

Department of Labor Communications Director Julie Rabinowitz said the January 2016 citations were based on a January 2015 inspection at MCC following a complaint from that location. She said the department did not conduct any inspections of the scanner at Maine State Prison.

The issues in the citation were addressed immediately, Rabinowitz said — MCC conducted the appropriate training and ensured the installation and operation followed manufacturers directions, so the fine was reduced from \$500 to \$50 and has been paid in full.

An anonymous source stated the scanners at MCC and MSP have been removed.

Piper said he was not sure whether the scanner at MCC was taken out of service, but said, "I'm sure [current DOC Commissioner] Joseph Fitzpatrick would have gotten rid of them if he ever heard there was a health concern."

### **Group strip-searches**

Jackson, of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, said since the X-ray scanner was removed at MSP, inmates have been subject to group strip-searches whenever they enter or exit the prison. The coalition is in conversations with the commissioner about alternative screening measures, such as using a magnetic scanner like the one used on visitors.

“It’s a catch-22,” he said. “It’s either [X-ray scanners] or the strip searches. That’s where we are right now. But anything detrimental to a prisoner’s health we’re against.”

Other correctional facilities across the country — in Cincinnati and New York for example — have also stopped using transmission X-ray scanners because the practice violated state laws or health rules. The Associated Press reported that New York City purchased seven of these scanning systems for nearly \$1 million in 2013 and used them for a year at the Rikers Island jail complex. They were uninstalled in 2014 after a series of lawsuits by inmates and the discovery of a state law that bans the use of radiological devices for non-medical purposes.

New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, where Ponte is now commissioner, has recently spent another \$1 million to equip all 54 state prisons with new, non-radiological "Cellsense" scanning devices, manufactured by UK-based security company Metrasens, which can detect contraband hidden inside the bodies of moving subjects, according to a press release from the New York governor's office. The Metrasens website does not reveal the technology used, and lists as a benefit that if subjects do not know the technology, they do not know how to trick the device.

DOC Commissioner Joseph Fitzpatrick, Deputy Commissioner Jody Breton, Maine State Prison Warden Randall Liberty, Maine Correctional Center Warden Steve Landry and New York Department of Corrections Commissioner Joseph Ponte did not respond to calls or requests for information for this article between Sept. 23 and Sept. 27. Staff at Maine Correctional Center and Maine State Prison referred questions to the DOC central office in Augusta.

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