



## **Review of Environmental/Medical Allegations at the State Correctional Institution at Fayette**

December 31, 2014

After a comprehensive review following complaints of dangerous environmental conditions at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Fayette, the Department of Corrections has found no credible evidence of any unsafe environmental conditions at the facility or of any abnormalities with regard to the safety and health of inmates at the prison.

The Department was made aware of reports alleging that unsafe levels of coal waste in the vicinity of SCI Fayette were connected to purported medical problems for inmates at the facility. The Department takes concerns regarding the safety and welfare of its inmates very seriously. As a result, the Department initiated environmental tests and medical reviews to examine the conditions at the prison. The Department found no evidence of any unsafe environmental conditions or any related medical issues.

Initial complaints contained conclusory allegations that coal waste in the vicinity of SCI Fayette had contaminated the environment. In response, the Department commissioned independent tests of its water supply to be performed in August 2014. Analysts concluded that the water met all drinking water standards and guidelines; there was no determination of any chemical concentrations that would cause adverse health conditions.

In addition, the Department appointed a medical review team to examine medical records and data to identify any irregularities for residents of SCI Fayette. Studies comparing the facility to other state institutions clearly confirmed no significant difference in the number and types of health issues raised by residents at SCI Fayette when compared to other Pennsylvania prisons. The medical review team examined the medical records of individual inmates who complained of symptoms at the facility, as well as their subsequent treatment. The team found that in many of these cases, the individuals' symptoms were treated and resolved by medical personnel after a single sick call visit.

The Department reviewed rates of cancer at SCI Fayette and found no irregular results. The Department's Bureau of Health Care Services maintains an extensive database of all current cancer patients in state prison

facilities. SCI Fayette has a cancer rate of 11 cancer patients per 1,000 inmates. Compared to the other state prison institutions, SCI Fayette's rate falls exactly in the middle.

The Bureau of Health Care Services also maintains a database on all mortalities within the state institutions. For the period 2010-2013, the statewide average number of cancer deaths per 1,000 inmates was 1.09. SCI Fayette had 1.34 cancer deaths per 1,000 inmates, ranking it seventh in the state behind Laurel Highlands, Smithfield, Waymart, Graterford, Pittsburgh and Rockview.

A more detailed analysis of the 11 cancer deaths at SCI Fayette from 2010 to 2013, revealed that four were transferred to SCI Fayette after they had been diagnosed with cancer at other institutions. Two patients were diagnosed with lung cancer while at SCI Fayette during this four-year time frame.

The Department also reviewed whether there was an increased incidence of respiratory diseases at SCI Fayette by reviewing the administration of pulmonary medications ordered at the prison. For the period of 2010-2013, the Department found that SCI Fayette's administration of pulmonary medications was in the middle or slightly lower than that of other institutions.

This finding is corroborated by a review of inmates enrolled in Pulmonary Chronic Care Clinic. Inmates who have chronic respiratory diseases are followed every six months in the Pulmonary Chronic Care Clinic. A review of the number of patients per 1,000 currently being clinically followed places SCI Fayette right in the middle of state correctional institutions.

Finally, the Department reviewed the administration of gastrointestinal medications ordered from 2010 to 2013 at SCI Fayette and found the prison to be ranked in the middle of the total number of state facilities.

In conclusion, by all of the measures reviewed, the Department has found no scientific data to support claims of any unsafe environmental conditions or any related medical issues to exist at SCI Fayette.

Although the Department is satisfied with its internal review, it has also submitted the matter to the Pennsylvania Department of Health for additional review.