

New Generation Jails

The new generation **jail** is a departure from the traditional **jail** in its architecture, interior design, and design philosophy. The **jail's** state-of-the-art design attempts to create a safer and more humane environment for both the inmates and staff. The most important element of this new design is more effective supervision of inmates. Unlike traditional **jails** where inmates are only occasionally observed by correction officers, in the new generation **jail** inmates are under continuous and direct supervision.

The design was developed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in the early 1970s and was first implemented in 1975 in newly constructed federal **jails** (known as Metropolitan Correctional Centers), in New York, Chicago, and San Diego. The first county-operated **jail** with the new generation design was built in Contra Costa County, California, and opened in 1981. Soon thereafter, new generation **jails** opened in Pima County (Tucson, Arizona), Multnomah County (Portland, Oregon), Clark County (Las Vegas, Nevada), and Spokane County (Spokane, Washington). In 2001, there were 300 new generation **jails** in operation throughout the United States and many more under design or construction (S. Schilling, National Institute of Corrections, personal communication, February 8, 2001). The design has been applied to **jails** as small as 47 beds (Benzie County, Michigan) and as large as 3,640 beds (Bexar County, Texas).

TRADITIONAL JAIL DESIGNS

Prior to the 1970s, most U.S. **jails** and prisons had a linear architectural design in which living areas (or "cell blocks") consisted of multiple-occupancy cells or dormitories aligned along a corridor or hallway. The problem with this design is that the correctional officers are unable to see what is going on in more than one or two cells at a time. As a result, there is what is typically referred to as "intermittent supervision," in that the correctional officers must patrol the corridors to observe inmates within the cells or dormitories. Patrol frequency and thoroughness may vary depending on the number of staff in the facility and the preferences of individual officers. Even in the best-operated linear **jails**, officers may be required to patrol the corridors only once or twice an hour. In the interval between patrols, inmates are essentially unsupervised and have ample opportunities to engage in misconduct. To compensate for the minimal staff supervision, high-security hardware such as bars, metal doors, electronic surveillance, and eavesdropping equipment are relied on to control aggressive inmate behavior. Heavy metal bars, for example, separate correctional officers from inmates and help to prevent inmate assaults against staff. Indestructible metal furnishings bolted to the ground or walls limit inmate vandalism, and reinforced concrete walls, metal fences, and razor wire hinder prisoner escapes. Yet not all destructive inmate behavior can be controlled by this hardware. Assaults, rapes, or even homicides may occur between inmates housed together in cells or dormitories. So too might inmate suicides, vandalism and property damage, extortion, robbery or other predation.

DESIGN OF NEW GENERATION JAILS

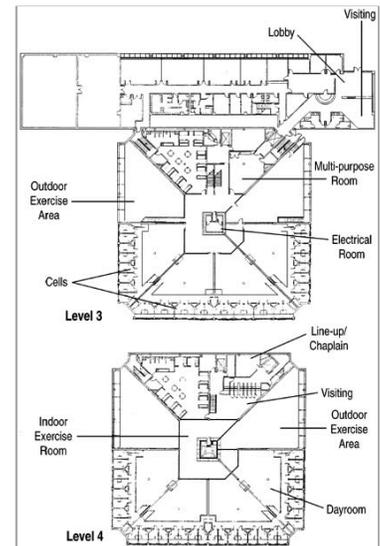


Diagram of a new generation jail shows the central control room, public areas, and cells arrayed around the public spaces.

A Committee of the American Institute of Architects. (1985). *1985 Architecture for Justice Exhibition*. Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects, p. 14.

A guiding principle of the new generation **jail** design is that inmates must be under continuous observation by the correctional staff to prevent opportunities for misconduct (Zupan 1991). The architecture of the new generation **jail** is styled to facilitate this rigorous supervision. Smaller, more manageable groups of between sixteen and forty-six inmates are housed in self-contained living areas called "modules" or "pods" composed of single-occupancy cells arranged around a common area called a "dayroom." The inmates' daily activities, visitation, and recreation occur within the module, thus reducing the movement of inmates within the **jail** and the opportunities for security breaches such movement entails. Each module is staffed, 24 hours a day, by a correctional officer. The officer is in direct physical proximity to inmates, as there are no bars, walls, or other barriers separating the officer from the prisoners. The officer can easily observe most areas of the housing area from a single vantage point. This method of inmate management is referred to as "direct inmate supervision."

The high-security hardware so important to inmate control in linear **jails** is noticeably absent in the modules of the new generation **jails**. There are no physical barriers such as heavy metal bars, grills, or grates. Furnishings are made of wood or plastic, rather than metal. Toilets and sinks are porcelain, not stainless steel. In the new generation **jail**, it is assumed that staff, rather than hardware, will control aggressive inmate behavior.

The interior of the new generation **jail** is designed to reduce the high level of stress that contributes to inmate violence. Psychologists have long known that environmental irritants such as noise, lack of privacy and territory, crowding, and lack of color can lead to aggressive behavior, particularly in individuals already prone to violence. Dayrooms complete with carpeting and upholstered furniture, for example, alleviate stress by absorbing irritating noise. Individual cells for inmates lessen the stress associated with lack of privacy and territory. The presence of mezzanines and open dayrooms diminishes the perception of crowding (even if the module is over capacity) and its related stresses. Colors such as rose, teal, gray, and peach on the walls soothe emotions rather than arouse them.

Although the architecture and interior design of the new generation **jail** are important, it is the direct supervision concept that is the critical feature of the new generation **jail**. Because the correctional officers are inside the module, their job is much more complex, requiring more sophisticated people skills than is needed in linear **jails**. Officers are expected to control inmates primarily through their leadership and communication skills; consequently, they receive extensive training in interpersonal communication and relations, principles of supervision, crisis and conflict management, problem solving, and various other human relations skills. The techniques used to deal with the inmates are reminiscent of those used by good parents, such as proactive rules enforcement, progressive discipline, early intervention into and reconciliation of disputes, fair and consistent application of rules, positive expectations, and active interaction and communication (Zupan et al. 1986).

The basic assumption is that direct supervision will significantly curb negative inmate behavior in a number of ways. First, the presence of the officer inside the module should deter many inmates from aggressive behavior. Second, the officer is in an excellent position to observe and quickly defuse a possibly violent situation. Third, because the officer has more contact with inmates, he or she will be better able to sense when problems may arise and to learn about a potential crisis through informal interactions with inmates.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NEW GENERATION JAILS

Preliminary studies of the new generation **jail** design show that it is generally effective in controlling negative inmate behavior, particularly when compared to linear **jails**. In a comparison of five new generation and six linear **jails**, the National Institute of Corrections (Nelson and O'Toole 1983) found fewer inmate homicides, suicides, aggravated assaults, escapes, and escape attempts in the new generation facilities. Sigurdson (1985, 1987a, 1987b) studied new generation **jails** in Manhattan, Pima County, and Larimer County (Colorado) and found few, if any, incidents of inmate homicides, suicides, sexual or aggravated assaults, inmate disturbances, escapes, vandalism, or possessions of contraband.

Senese and associates (1992) compared the number and types of inmate rule violations that occurred in one

county before and after the transition to a new generation **jail**. They found that the number of violations for inmate violence, contraband, suicides, and escapes decreased significantly after the transition to the new generation **jail**, but that the number of violations for property theft and inmate misbehavior (i.e., disobeying orders) increased. Bayens and colleagues (1997) also studied inmate rule violations in one county before and after the transition to a new generation **jail** and reported an overall decline in the number of staff reports of inmate rule infractions. The most dramatic reduction was in the area of aggressive behavior such as assaults, batteries, sex offenses, attempted suicides, fires, possession of weapons, and escapes.

These researchers and others who have studied new generation **jails** concur that the new design is not a panacea. It does not miraculously transform inmates into law-abiding and obedient individuals. Even in new generation **jails**, some inmates will pose management problems. The difference, however, is that in the new generation **jail** they have fewer opportunities to do so without being observed and disciplined by the staff.

—Linda L. Zupan

Further Reading

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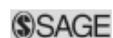
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